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A RECORD OF THE SURINAM COCKROACH IN VANCOUVER

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An adult female cockroach was brought to Simon Fraser University for identification in April 1986. It had been collected in an office on one of the upper floors of a highrise block in downtown Vancouver. According to Mr. Rex Case, the district manager of the pest control company that serviced this block and a nearby ground-level shopping centre, these cockroaches had been sufficiently numerous to cause complaint. In the office, the largest population seemed to be in a room containing a photocopier near which there was a neglected planter. We later searched the office but found only fragments of cockroaches. The photocopying room did not contain any food or drink and did not appear to be a suitable habitat for cockroaches.

The specimen was identified as *Pycnoscelus surinamensis* (L.), an Indomalaysian species that in its introduced North American and European forms is parthenogenetic. Another unusual characteristic of this species is that the egg pod is withdrawn into a brood pouch until hatching, making them effectively viviparous. They were evidently first identified in Canada in 1938 as a serious pest girdling the stems of roses in a large greenhouse in Grimsby, Ont. (Anon. 1938), and there is a casual remark by Mallis (1982) that it was seen in large numbers in a bird house at the Toronto zoo.

The Surinam cockroach is about 2cm long, obviously larger than the German cockroach (1 to 1.5cm) and

smaller than the American and Australian cockroaches (3 to 4cm), all of which are more commonly found in Vancouver. In the specimens we examined, the pronotum is uniformly dark apart from a narrow anterior yellow line. The posterior margin of the pronotum is sinuate. The tibiae and tarsi are relatively short particularly on the mesothoracic leg and, compared with the commoner species, the tarsal segments are extremely narrow. The tibiae are broad and armed with strong, presumably fossorial, spines. These key characters are shown in Fig. 1. The wings are pale brown and well developed, normally covering the rather stubby cerci. We assume the adults can fly but have neither observed this nor seen any mention of it in the literature.

We believe that these insects have been introduced on indoor plants imported from the United States. Even if the plants are brought in without soil it is very likely that a single small nymph could avoid detection in an appressed axil or loose fibrous material around a stem. A search was made in the warehouse of one of the companies that supplied plants to the shopping centre where the cockroaches were found. None was seen or caught with sticky cockroach traps set around the plants.

We have seen no references to this species as an urban pest but in view of the proliferation of environmental planting in offices and shopping malls entomologists should be aware that it might well become one.

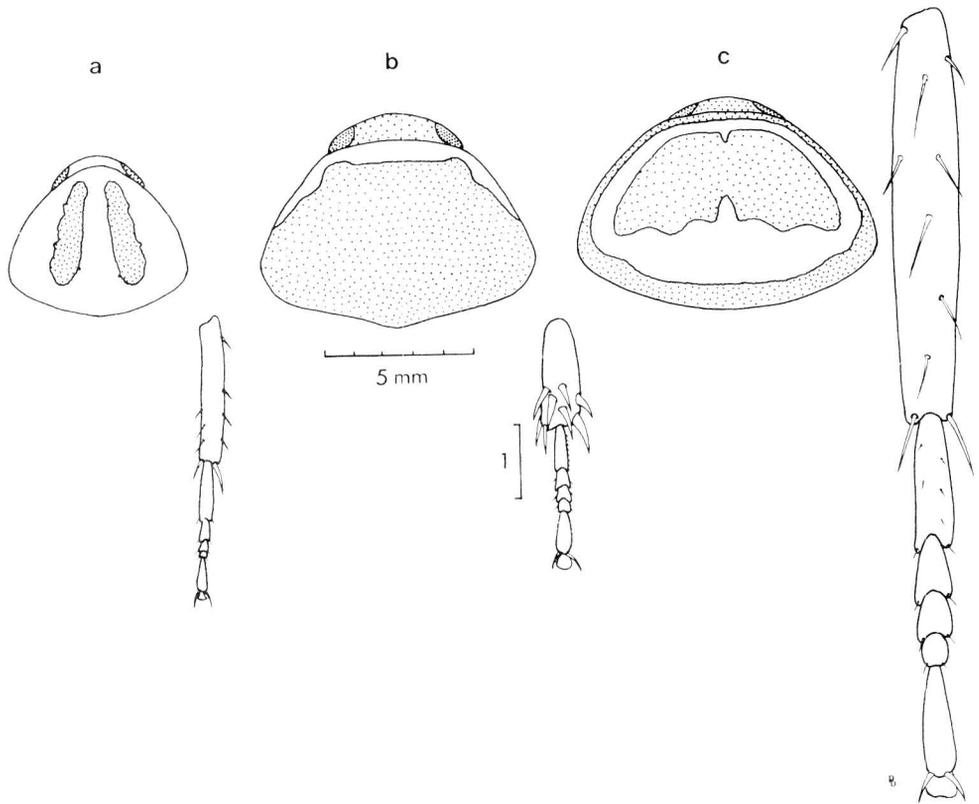


Fig. 1. Shape and typical colour patterns (Vancouver area) of a, German; b, Surinam and c, Australian cockroach. Scale 5mm. Right mesotibiae and tarsi are drawn alongside at higher magnification, scale 1mm.

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