August 1994 in French Guyana

by Olivier Décobert

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In August, 1994, I spent more than three weeks in French Guiana. I went as a backpacker and was alone on this trip. I wanted to explore the forest and search for insects, especially beetles but also butterflies - as there are many colorful and wonderful species in that part of the world. Of course, I found scarabs in the families Rutelidae, Cetoniidae, Scarabaeidae, and Dynastidae.

After landing at Rochambeau Airport, I took a taxi to begin my exploration. The driver dropped me off beside the Comté River and I continued walking along the road. I tried hitch-hiking but no cars stopped the first day. I had a jungle hammock in my backpack and I tied it between two trees to spend the night.

The second day, a car stopped and brought me to the village of Cacao. There was forest surrounding the village on all sides. I wanted to stay there and installed my hammock in a “carbet” (a French name for a
Rutelidae found in the region of Cacao:

*Antichira capucina* (Fabricius)  *Chasmodia brunnea* (Perty)  *Epichalcoplethis chameleon* (Voet)

Cetoniidae (*Gymnetis* spp.) taken in banana traps near Cacao.
place to hang your hammock). I collected in the area during the following two weeks, trying to find beetles by all means: sometimes using a net, by placing banana and also dung traps in the forest.

During my stay, I found insects but also saw many animals including monkeys, agoutis, turtles, lizards, frogs, and tarantulas. One night, I was awakened by a frugivorous bat which was eating my bananas next to my hammock! I also met some very friendly people in this lost village of the jungle.

After my two weeks in Cacao, I traveled to Cayenne on a local minibus, rented a room, and spent a few days in and around this little town. I collected insects near Rorota Lake, not far from Cayenne (about 10 km, along the coast).
I am resting in my hammock in the “carbet.”

*Megasoma actaeon* (L.) male, taken at light trap at Cacao.

*A Rutela* collected near Cacao.

*Megasoma actaeon* (L.) male, taken at light trap at Cacao.

My late friend Pascal caught a tarantula (*Avicularia*). Pascal is gone, but never forgotten!

Flowers on a tall tree.
Scarabaeidae collected from dung traps found around Cacao or Cayenne.

Everywhere, I saw morphos, incredible butterflies, throwing off blue flashes as they flew!

At the end of my trip, I went back to Cacao by car with an entomologist friend who worked in Cayenne and whom I met during my first stay at Cacao. We wanted to use a light trap because of the new moon. It was a success for moths and also some scarabs (Pelidnota). A very big species came to light that night: *Megasoma actaeon!*
I obtained this specimen of *Titanus giganteus* Linnaeus (size 15 cm) from a resident of Cacao (the village where I spent the most of my time in August 1994). This species is found in winter so I did not get a chance to collect it.

A *Pelidnota* from Cacao.

*Acrocinus longimanus* (Linnaeus).

*Euchroma gigantea* (Linnaeus).

The Comté River, near Cacao.
A Revision of the Genus *Eurysternus*

Dung Beetles (Scarabaenae) are recognized and used as one of the principal bioindicators of ecosystem health and classification. The genus *Eurysternus* is one of the dominant taxa of Scarabaenae in the Neotropical region where they have a key impact on ecosystems. This book will allow for the easy identification of the 53 currently recognized species of this important genus through multilingual identification keys (French, English, Spanish and Portuguese), an extensive collection of illustrations (drawings, scanning electron micrographs and photographs) and color distributional maps. A complete taxonomic treatment of the genus and information on collecting methods, habitat and phenology are provided for all species. Data were compiled by the author from over 16,500 specimens studied.


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François Génier proudly displaying his revision.

Valerie of Scarabs displaying some of the plates.
In Past Years - XXVI - 1983

by Henry F. Howden

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In the last week of February, 1983, Anne and I took advantage of the Carleton University “Study Break” and booked a Theater Tour to London, England. The tour included air fare, hotel, breakfast and 20 British pounds for theater tickets. We told everyone that we needed some culture, but actually it was the least expensive way to spend a week working at the British Museum (Natural History). We blew our theater money on a single show staring Alec Guinness. He was great, but the narrow seats with little leg room rather spoiled the evening. I noticed a person taller than me and wondered how he fitted in the seat; I checked and noticed that he left the seat folded up and sat on the edge! What some theater lovers will do! During the day we both examined types and looked for material that interested us. The trip was uneventful and the weather was great compared to Ottawa weather.

In June we started one of our meandering trips; final destination Australia. We flew to Los Angeles where we were met by Elbert and Cathy Sleeper and spent the afternoon and evening with them. The next morning we visited with Art Evans, returning briefly to the Sleepers before leaving for Honolulu at 10 PM. We then flew on to Auckland, New Zealand, arriving at 8:30 AM local time. As on a previous trip, we were met by Brenda May and her husband and went directly to their home at Huia. I set a few dung traps near their house and spent much of the day napping.

The next day Brenda took us to the D.S.I.R. where we met with the staff, including Robin Craw. I found that he was a believer in the ideas of Leon Croizat, who was a strong believer in “tracks” and land bridges. He definitely did not believe in long-distance dispersal and demeaned everyone that did. We had an interesting discussion about this, particularly as I did not agree with Croizat. Several years later I attended a symposium on the subject where a paper by Croizat was read, and a British scientist

Photo 1: Near Hyden, WA. The sign says: “Take care, prevent bush” (many places in WA do!) - the word “fires” originally painted in red had faded, so it was no longer there. Nearby cleared land had to erect snow fencing to prevent the sandy soil from blowing and forming drifts across the road.
sitting beside me, who had come over just to attend the meeting, asked “Who is this idiot”? Since the meeting was about Croizat, the fact that the visitor had not known who he was, made me wonder who was the greater “idiot”. Enough said. We spent one more day at the D.S.I.R., picked up my traps, which yielded two species of *Saphobius*, and left the next day for Sydney, Australia.

As before, we were met by Geoff Holloway and taken to his home in Engadine, just south of Sydney. There we spent four days, collecting locally, working at the Australian Museum and planning for a later trip to western NSW. On July 4 we left for Perth, WA. A brief stop was made in Adelaide to return some specimens to the South Australian Museum. In Perth, two and one-half time zones from Sydney (one can get confused about time zones in Australia), we were met by James Ridsdill-Smith (CSIRO), who helped us in many ways during our two days in Perth. If you have read previous parts of my ramblings, it is easy to guess that we then met the Carnabys at Wilga. Since our last visit Keith, a stamp collector among other interests, had developed a dislike of the rapidly escalating postal rates. To express his dislike, he bought a postal scale and, by putting in bits of cardboard, made sure that every letter he mailed was at maximum weight! That was only one of his many ways of objecting to most types of government regulations. To Keith, “Rule Britannia” was not a song but translated into the early export of the worst of British rules and regulations to Australia.

For the next two weeks we retraced much of our previous trip, again finding Mt. Magnet too dry. At first some places visited near Hyden were dry (Photo 1) so we reversed our itinerary and headed toward the west coast, then over to Coolgardie (too dry), back toward the coast and north to Ballidu and Yalgoo (Photo 2). Just before Ballidu the weather turned cold and rainy and for most of the rest of the time in WA it was cool to cold. On several nights it was cold enough to put a skim of ice on our water supply. Even then, at these low temperatures, one or two bolboceratines came to...
Because of the rain, the “bolbos” were active (Photo 3) and we excavated numbers of them during the days when it didn’t rain. Toward the end of our stay in WA we went back to the coast and near Desperation Bay (north of Perth) collected a new Blackbolbus. We took many other species both described and undescribed, but the new Blackbolbus was the only species we hadn’t taken before. Taking a rather sinuous route we drove back at Wilga, said goodbye to the Carnabys, and drove back to Perth. Then on July 20, we flew back to Sydney in the rain.

Much of NSW had had rain sometime during the last few weeks, in some cases too much, as the Darling River flooded large areas (Photo 4) in the western part of the state. After several days with the Holloways, Anne and I flew to Canberra to visit with Ev Britton and John Lawrence. We spent only one day in Canberra, returning some type material to the CSIRO and examining newly acquired specimens. The following day we joined Geoff Holloway, who was driving a museum Toyota loaded with camping equipment, and left for the “out back” (i.e., anything west of Burke, NSW). The second night we camped 19 km north of Roto (Photo 5), where we dug several species of bolboceratines; black lighting was no good as it was not only cool but the moon was full. Two more days were spent collecting on our way to Broken Hill, NSW, getting a moderate number of beetles along the way. That night in Broken Hill it rained...
hard (an inch or more). The next
day we drove west to Port Augusta,
SA, through intermittent showers,
which dampened our collecting!
Three days were spent collecting to
the west and north of Port Augusta
in reddish sand dunes. There we
managed to get a good series of a
new Blackbolbus, which was later
named B. augustus. We were still
plagued by intermittent rains, so
we moved northeast through the
Flinders Range (Photo 6) to camp at
the southwest end of Lake Frome.

Our camp site was near a rabbit
proof fence (not really proof) which
had been used to hang (Photo 7)
dead dingos (native dogs, Canis
dingo) which were hunted because
they killed livestock, particularly
sheep. While there were showers,
only the first inch of soil was damp,
and, except for Trox, no scarabs
were seen. The next day we moved
south (Photo 8) to Yunta which had
a pub, where we booked two rooms
as the weather was too cold and
windy for tenting. As was often the
case, there was no heating, so we
sat on a bed with an electric blanket
and played cards. The next day we
drove back to Broken Hill and spent
a day cleaning up. One day was
spent collecting south of Broken
Hill before we drove north on the
Silver Highway to Tibooburra. The
so-called “highway”, which was
marked on our map as a main road,
turned out to be only a dirt track
(Photo 9). When we did eventually
reach Tibooburra it turned out
to be a two pub town; one of the
pubs was called the family pub;
I will not comment on the other
except to say that the art work

Photo 6: East side of Flinders Range, SA, we encountered
flocks of Cockatoos. If I could have brought a few live
ones back to Canada, the cost of the trip could have been
recovered!

Photo 7: The rabbit proof fence with dead dingos (Canis
dingo) hung on the fence near our camp just south of
Lake Frome, SA; dry at that time.

Photo 8: South of Lake Frome, an abandoned building
(homestead?) built by some optimist, probably after
several years of wet weather.
was interesting. The town was in the “corner country” where New South Wales, South Australia and Queensland meet; in the corner of NSW is Sturt National Park. We found the Ranger, Rod Holmes and his wife Ruth, extremely helpful. They took us to the Park guest house and made sure that we were comfortable. The town had a small dirt airport, a racetrack (Photo 10) and a very unusual golf course with the fairway of clay (Photo 11) and the so-called greens made of sand; in other words a typical, small outback town.

For two years there had been essentially no rain and it was interesting to note which beetle groups had survived. Oddly enough many aquatic beetles had survived, but ground beetles and the Scarabaeinae (dung beetles) had not. Fortunately enough, the drought did not seem to bother the bolboceratines, where there had been some rain they were rather common. All of the roads in every direction were only dirt tracks, many badly rutted. One day east of town we were caught in a sudden, heavy shower and learned a new (to us) lesson. The area that we were in had been dry and the road surface a dark clay. After driving in the rain for a few minutes I found the car impossible to steer. When I looked under the car I found the wheel wells full of clay. The shallow layer of wet, dark clay had wrapped around the tires, filling the wells until turning was impossible. To get back to town, I had to dig out the tire wells every few hundred yards (Photo 12); it
took us at least three hours to drive the last few miles back to town! Later, I realized why there were many ruts in some of the roads and why the police closed the main “roads” when it rained. If the ruts were frequently leveled, the road became lower than the adjacent land and filled with water when it rained; some tracks became flooded anyway. Because sandy tracks were often damper or more compressed, we found many burrows at the sides and even in the middle of the tracks (Photo 13).

We rather rapidly became known in the town, partly as just visitors and probably more so by our activities; the locals were interested but polite enough not to laugh. During the second week of our stay, we were invited to a “tea” by the local school master. It turned out to be a large affair with the local policeman, ranger, etc., all present. The main items of interest were “yabbies”, a fresh water crayfish (native to much of Australia, introduced to WA where it is invasive) caught in an artificial lake in the Park by the policeman. When produced at the party, he was immediately reminded that he had broken the law by collecting in the National Park without a permit. His response was: “They were arrested crossing the road”! They were a great treat and, along with a good supply of beer, made it an evening to be remembered. Shortly before we were due to leave Tibooburra, there was a hard rain that closed the roads and left a number of travelers stranded. That evening Rod, the Park ranger, gave a slide show about the Park for visitors and anyone interested. Sitting next to me was, I learned, a flying parson who intended to fly the next day to some isolated homesteads (Photo 14); he said the airfields weren’t closed, even if the roads were! When I found out that he flew a four-seat Cessna 180, I offered to pay for his gas if
he would take us with him. He was happy to do so and we left the next morning for the homestead on Strzelecki Creek, SA, (Photo 15) with a stop in NSW on the way.

The homestead landing strip (Photo 16) was some distance from the house so we first buzzed the house then landed, and a car was sent to pick up the parson. Geoff, Anne and I stayed near the plane and collected on scattered bushes in the sand hills. We later learned that there had been no rain for three years. The scattered bushes yielded a few chrysomelids, ants and nothing else. We found several dead kangaroos with associated *Trox*. Also, Anne collected a few weevils under boards. We ate lunch in the shade of the plane, and left shortly thereafter. Our flight back to town was uneventful.

The next day we packed and curated some of the insects collected overnight. In all, our stay at Tibooburra yielded six or seven species of bolboceratines, one of them undescribed. The next day the road south was dry enough to allow us to go to Broken Hill.

At Broken Hill, Geoff’s wife, Jan, and son, Andrew, joined us and we drove south to Kinchega National Park, where we were lodged in the old sheep sheering housing. The Park includes part of the Darling River with several lakes and is an important wildlife conservation area. The area has a somewhat higher rainfall than Tibooburra and many sandy areas. During

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**Photo 14:** Tinga Tingana Homestead near Strzelecki Creek, SA. Most services were by radio, e.g. School of the Air, or by plane once a week mail delivered from Broken Hill, Flying Doctors, Flying Parsons, etc.

**Photo 15:** Part of the Sturt Desert near Strzelecki Creek from the air. Once every four or five years they have a wet year and ship the livestock into the isolated homesteads. In dry years the reverse occurs. Somehow this system often seems to be profitable!
the four days we were there, we collected not only the usual array of bolboceratines but numerous other scarabs on dung and carrion. The second day we were there I thought I heard a familiar voice; I was right. It turned out to be a friend of mine who taught at Queens University, Kingston, Ontario, and was at the Park to survey the extent of flooding and its effect on the wildlife. It really is a rather small world. A day later we discovered an emu nest with a number of eggs (Photo 17). I was all for trying to eat one, when Geoff told me that there was no telling how long an egg had been there and, if it had rotted, it was not wise to open it! So I missed the opportunity of trying a scrambled emu egg. There were a number of kangaroos in the Park and one species of Onthophagus that we collected had its tarsal claws modified to grasp the kangaroo’s hairs. In that way they were never far from a supply of dung!

We left the park with some regret and drove to Wilcania and then to Burke, collecting in several areas along the way. Most of the side roads were closed because of flooding (Photo 18) from the Darling River and it was only when we got to Burke that we were able to explore some of the sandy tracks. Some of our best collecting was along or in the dirt tracks where they crossed sand ridges, but even there many of the dirt roads were blocked by flooding. At least we saw the town which people from Sydney considered the beginning of the “out back”. It was late August and time
for us to head home. We gradually returned to Sydney via Dubbo, collecting in several places along the way. At the eastern edge of the escarpment of the Great Dividing Range we took a few pictures (Photo 19), then drove to Sydney. One day was spent with the Holloways, which included a visit to the Australian Museum, and then we flew back to Ottawa with a stop over in Los Angeles. There we made a vow to avoid the L.A. airport whenever possible; at that time it was a mess - construction and traffic!

A Scarab Crop Circle

This image has been on the Internet for some time. To us, it looks like a dung beetle flying its dung ball to another location - a unique strategy! Notice how the creators of this crop circle cleverly used pre-existing rows in the field for the elytral suture. Who makes these mysterious crop circles? A clue was presented by Editor Barney’s favorite podcast *The Skeptics’ Guide to the Universe* (highly rated, weekly, free on iTunes): the number of new crop circles dramatically increases once final examinations at the British universities are finished.
Over the past several weeks, we have received several emails and letters asking the same question: “Where has all the forced humor gone?” and “Why has Scarabs become so serious since Billy Bob relinquished his Editor’s status?”

We have also received a few questions as to why the trap designs presented in Scarabs do not work. So, we thought we would deal with both issues in a single article.

While our trap specialists Anne and Tammy were off investigating a failed banana trap, we received a frantic call from a collector whose dung trap failed to work. So, we sent Cindy and Sonja (Photo 1) to the site.

What they found was that the collector (the presumed dung source) barely chewed his food before swallowing, hence the intact corn kernels in the feces. So far, so good. He buried the cup, filled it with water, and used sticks to “add to the aroma.” Again, he did everything correctly.

The reason for the failure was that the dumbo used an Upper Reifschneider Rain Shield to protect the trap from the rain, when he should have used a
As you can see (Photo 4), all the ingredients are there: water bottle, bananas, Mexican beer, molasses, sugar, and even some fine French wine. They suspected that the scarabaeologist in question was attempting to emulate Julien Touroult (see *Scarabs* #21) of France with the wine.

The collector’s thoughts on the problem were that the bananas were too green. Indeed, his comment speaks for itself...

We just wanted to give you an example of a typical day here at the headquarters of the *Scarabs* newsletter. Hopefully, you have a better idea of what our poor staff must put up with!

Lower Reifschneider Rain Shield (see *Scarabs* #15). Yes, his choice of red for the Upper Shield shows a certain *laudace artistique*, but its size is insufficient to protect the trap.

Meanwhile, our trap researchers Anne and Tammy (Photo 3) hiked to the base of the Catalina Mountains to find out why a banana trap had failed to catch any cetonids.

Photo 3: Trap experts Anne and Tammy at the science.

Photo 4: A closeup of the failed banana trap.