

NOTES ON TWO RARE DARKLING BEETLES FROM FLORIDA (COLEOPTERA: TENEBRIONIDAE)

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Branchus floridanus LeConte

(Fig. 1)

Several years ago Triplehorn discovered a specimen of this species among a miscellaneous lot of Tenebrionidae submitted for determination by the Florida Department of Agriculture. The specimen was taken in a bird bath at Key West, Florida, 14 December 1960, by C. A. Bennett.

The species was first named by LeConte in his diagnosis of the genus *Branchus* (1862, p. 223) and was later redescribed by the same author (1866, p. 111). Despite the fact that the 1862 description was adequate for validating the name, LeConte himself and all subsequent authors have cited the 1866 date in referring to this species. *Branchus floridanus* is the type of the genus by monotypy.

LeConte (1866) states that the specimen (Type No. 4552, MCZ), a unique, from which his description was prepared, is from Florida, without more precise data. Dr. Howard E. Evans (in litt.) reported that there is one additional specimen of this species in the LeConte collection (Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University) labelled the same as the type.

The Blatchley collection (Purdue University) contains one specimen labelled Key West, Fla., 3 March 1919, W. S. Blatchley. The United States National Museum has 33 specimens collected at Miami Beach, Fla., in 1922 and 1923 (T. J. Spilman, in letter). This is the northernmost record and the largest series known to us. We have been unable to locate additional specimens although we have by no means conducted an exhaustive search. *Branchus floridanus* has remained an exceedingly rare beetle in collections since its discovery.

Recently Weems and Robert E. Woodruff succeeded in collecting 28 more specimens. All were in sand and debris near the beach on Big Pine Key, 6 May 1961. Triplehorn picked up two additional specimens (both dead) near Tavernier on Key Largo, 17 July 1963. They were several hundred yards from the ocean beach in the grass around buildings.

Little variation is evident in the specimens available, perhaps the greatest being the normal sexual dimorphism. Males are slightly smaller and less robust than the females. Males ranged from 11.9-13.7 mm in length and 6.2-7.3 mm in width. Females varied from 12.6-14.7 mm in length and 7.3-8.1 mm in width. The sculpture, punctation and dorsal vestiture of small yellowish scale-like setae are remarkably similar throughout the series. The narrow, longitudinal impunctate median line on the pronotum mentioned by LeConte is more or less conspicuous on all of them. Several other small, rounded impunctate areas in the lateral discal regions are evident and rather constant in location. These are visible without magnification.

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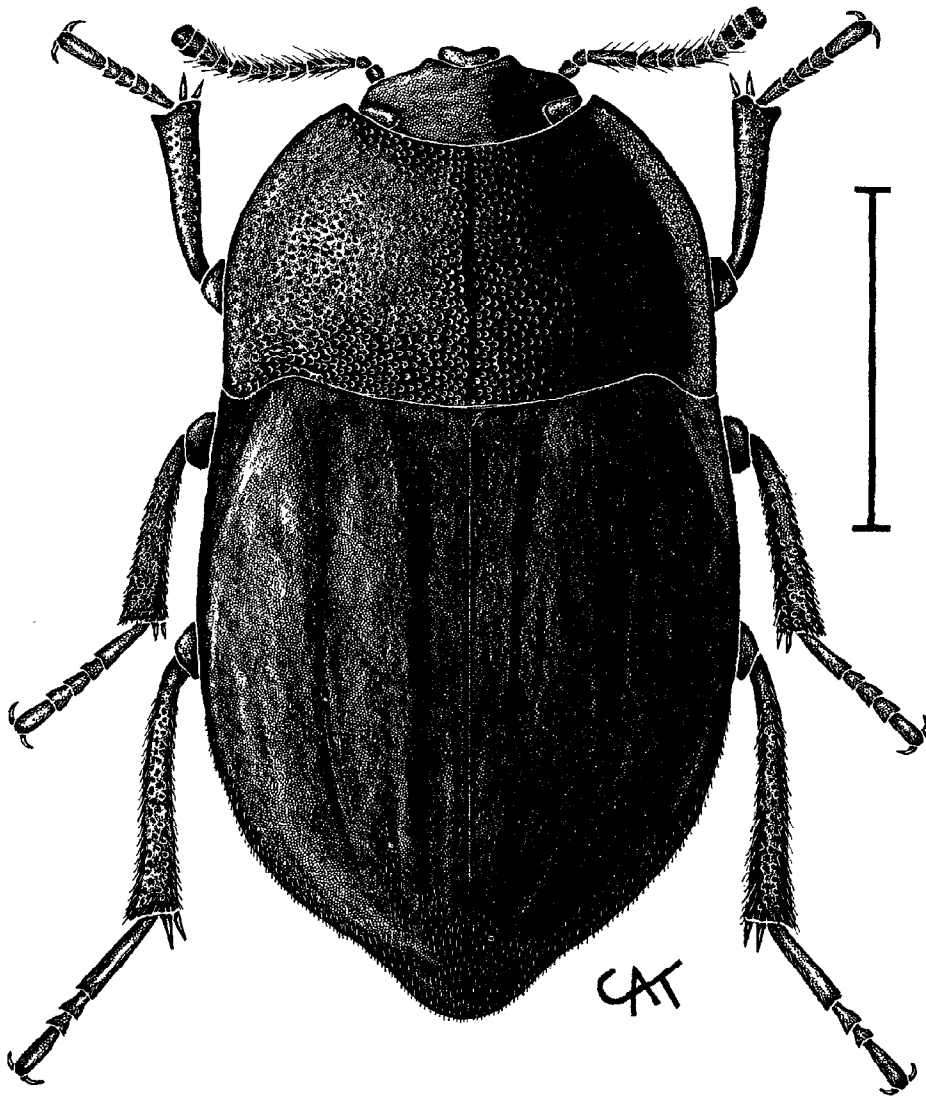


Fig. 1. *Branchus floridanus* LeConte, ♀. Big Pine Key, Florida.
(Line = 5 mm)

Palembus ocellaris Casey

In the course of a revisionary study of the Nearctic Diaperini, Triplehorn (in press), found that this species is very rare in collections. Only 18 specimens were encountered during a thorough search of 30 of the larger insect collections in North America. Most of these came from islands of the West Indies.

Both the genus and species were described by Casey in 1891. The type locality was given simply as Florida. Since then it has been taken at Key West as well as several islands of the West Indies. It has also been intercepted at Tampa on a ship from Mariel, Cuba.

Data accompanying specimens indicate a rather intimate association between this beetle and tamarind (*Tamarindus indicus* L.), a leguminous tree native to the Old World tropics but frequently planted as an ornamental in Florida and the New World tropics.

On a recent collecting trip, we were shown several specimens of *P. ocellaris* collected in seed pods of a tamarind growing on a lawn at Homestead, Fla., by Mr. James Richardson. On 19 July 1963 we systematically collected seed pods from the same tree and succeeded in obtaining 13 more specimens. This is the northernmost record for this beetle which is perhaps limited by the distribution of the tamarind plant.

Still more recently, October 15, 1963, Weems collected 35 more specimens from pods on a tamarind tree at Stock Island near Key West, Fla., emphasizing once again that many species are not actually rare if one knows where to look.

Specimens of both species discussed above are deposited in the Florida State Collection of Arthropods and The Ohio State University insect collections.

Grateful acknowledgement is expressed to Mr. Robert E. Woodruff of the Florida Department of Agriculture for providing many of the specimens for this study and to Dr. Howard E. Evans of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University for consulting the LeConte collection.

LITERATURE CITED

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NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING

The next annual meeting of the Florida Entomological Society will be held 22-24 Sept. 1965 at the Robert Meyer Motor Inn in Orlando.