Data request to compile an ecological atlas of Belgian harvestmen (Arachnida: Opiliones)

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Harvestmen (Arachnida: Opiliones) are among the most familiar arachnids, famous for their small body supported by remarkably long, slender legs. Unlike spiders, their cephalothorax is broadly fused with the abdomen, giving their body a single undivided appearance. Most species have a pair of eyes mounted on a raised bump on the top of their body, known as the ocularium, which serves as a useful identification feature (WIJNHOVEN 2009). Harvestmen are important predators of small invertebrates in the litter and soil layers, where they can reach densities comparable to those of spiders (DE SMEDT *et al.* 2019). Many species show a strong affinity for forest habitat (DOROW *et al.* 2019) and they are promising indicators of habitat quality. Nevertheless, they are rarely included in arthropod biodiversity surveys (BURRASCANO *et al.* 2021).

Figure 1: *Oligolophus tridens* (C.L. Koch, 1836) © Jinze Noordijk

The current checklist for Belgium comprises a total of 33 species (VANHERCKE 2026, DE SMEDT et al. 2026, unpublished data), yet our knowledge of each species' distribution remains fragmentary. Published records cover less than half of all UTM 10×10 km grids of Belgium, and are biased towards specimens collected using pitfall traps (e.g. Fig. 1), a method poorly suited to species that occur in the vegetation layer. The south of the country in particular remains under-explored (VANHERCKE 2010). Meanwhile, the composition of the harvestmen fauna in Europe is shifting considerably over recent decades (MARTENS 2021), making an updated assessment of their distribution in Belgium needed. The strong increase in available citizen science data can further complement recent species distribution data. The authors are currently compiling and quality-checking all existing occurrence data across Belgium to produce a new ecological atlas. However, many additional records are likely to exist in offline personal databases. In addition, numerous unsorted or archived samples from ecological surveys and pitfall trapping campaigns are probably awaiting identification by experts. We therefore invite anyone in possession of Belgian harvestmen specimens or records to contribute material and/or data. The resulting dataset will be published open-access and will serve as the basis for updated distribution maps and a revised checklist of harvestmen in Belgium.

Contributions or questions can be directed towards Wolf Missotten at wolfmissotten@gmail.com or Pallieter De Smedt at pallieter.desmedt@ugent.be.

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