Insects and arachnids associated with *Zygophyllum simplex* (Zygophyllaceae) in the central Namib Desert

by

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Received: 8 January 1980

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

One hundred and seven insects and arachnids were found associated with the succulent-leaved annual *Zygophyllum simplex* L. (Zygophyllaceae) in the central Namib Desert. The species are tabulated according to trophic niche.

Resident species are discussed with emphasis on behaviour, diet and seasonal periodicity. Several parasitoids were reared, and associated with their hosts. Many of the species found on *Z. simplex* appear to be undescribed.

1 INTRODUCTION

Zygophyllum simplex L. is a widespread, fleshy-leaved annual found in the arid and semi-arid regions of southern and northern Africa. At the Namib Research Institute, Gobabeb (23°34′S, 15°03′E), plants sprout after moderate rains (25 mm in June, 1979) and persist as small, dense bushes (1–5 dm high) for several months. Populations are concentrated in washes, roadside depressions and disturbed areas.

A few plant species flower continuously over several months during dry periods on the Namib Desert gravel plains. From November 1978 through May 1979 only 8,4 mm of rain fell at Gobabeb. Within 5 km of the Research Institute, only *Blepharis obmitrata*, *Calicorema capitata*, *Psilocaulon salicornioides*, *Sutera canescens*, and *Zygophyllum simplex* were in bloom for more than two months. Populations of *Z. simplex* were considerably larger than any of the other species, and were therefore chosen for study. The diversity and host specificity of the insect and arachnid fauna were briefly studied in order to increase our general knowledge of Namib Desert invertebrates. Emphasis was given to a qualitative rather than a quantitative estimate of the fauna. It is also hoped that the present work will serve as a basis for comparisons both with other areas in which *Z. simplex* occurs, and between wet and dry years in the Namib Desert.

In previous investigations of the Namib Desert invertebrate fauna, emphasis has been on free-ranging Coleoptera (Gebien, 1938; Koch, 1961, 1962; Holm and Edney, 1973; Holm, 1980). Very little has been done on the biology of other groups. Seely, *et al.* (1977) gave only ordinal or familial identifications for the satellite fauna associated with the dune perennial *Trianthema hereroensis*. They also listed biomass values for each species, but did not discuss biology. This study of *Z. simplex* is thus more comparable to that of Hesse (1934) on insects associated with *Gnidia laxa* in the Cape Province, South Africa.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

Two large washes were selected as study sites. Each contained approximately 300 plants growing in a 50 × 500 m area. The first site was 5 km from the Kuiseb River, and 5 km NNW of Gobabeb. The second site was 1,5 km from the Kuiseb River, and 0,5 km E of Gobabeb.

Observations began on 14 November 1978 and continued at bi-weekly intervals through until 9 July 1979. The number of flowering plants in each of two marked plots at the first study site was recorded during each sample period. All insects and arachnids not previously observed were also collected and notes were kept on the presence or absence of the most frequently observed species. Once a month activity was recorded throughout the day. On these days temperature records for activity of certa
with a YSI rapid response teleth
1971). Monthly samples of 10 s
plants were also taken. Stem
refrigerated in plastic bags and
scopically in the laboratory with
and spiders. Each stem was 15 cr
an average of 1/60th of the abo
plant (R = 1/30th – 1/320th). Soi
in November and December
plants, but were discontinued s
found. Eggs, nymphs and larvae
reared in the laboratory to obta
associate adults with immatures.

Observations from November th
made at the first study site and
was checked only briefly for co
had died in the first study
February and there were insuffi
the March stem count. In the
several plants lived through July
shifted to this site after Februar

An estimate of host specificity w
ing insects and spiders on *Blepl*
Psilocaulon. All plant species
first study site were also exam
samples for activity of specie
simplex.

Most of the collected material
Protection Research Institute, P
tion. A few of the species were
at the other institutions (se
Voucher specimens are depo
Collection (South Africa) and
Institute reference collection.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Flowering phenology

Nearly all plants were in flo
on 14 November. Stem sam
average of 35 flowers/15
of flowering plants was fairly
ber, but the 17 December
flowers/stem. By 29 Januar
plants in two marked plots
half that on 31 December.
stem in the January samp
were 7 plants in flower in
plants in the first study ar
April. Nearly 200 plants
study site by the end of M
Half of the plants died w
of the survivors flowered
June. By 9 July, there
large plants for a stem s
cluded.

3.2 Fauna

The 77 species found regularly associated with *Z. simplex* are listed in Table 1. Those observed only once or twice (30 species) are listed in Table 2.

3.2.1 Coleoptera

Coccinellidae. Larvae of *Rhodolia* lived in association with the margarodid scales. They are well-camouflaged within the mass of waxy excretions produced by the scales at the base of the plants. Adults were rarely encountered. *Scimnus* was active only in the spring (Nov. – Dec.).

Curculionidae. Numerous adults of two species of small, variegated weevils (Gen. 1) were active on stems and leaves from November through July. Larvae of one species developed inside the stems, hollowing out the core and usually chewing an exit hole at a node. Pupation usually occurred in frass-filled stems, but occasionally took place in the exit chamber. A second species mined the outer layers of the stem. Reared material suggests that these species are at least bivoltine, and probably multivoltine. This is supported by dissections of several monthly stem samples containing both small larvae and teneral adults or full-grown larvae. All stems from the monthly samples were at least partially hollowed out by weevil larvae. Difficulties in identification and paucity of reared material precluded better resolution of biological differences between the two species.

A *Tetrastichus* sp. was reared from the weevil larvae. Adult wasps were collected on the plant throughout the study period. Weevil exit holes also provide a retreat for thrips and coccoid nymphs in older stems.

Cybocephalidae. These small predators probably feed on scale insects (Endrödy-Younga, 1967), although the biology of the species on *Z. simplex* is unknown. Adults were active only in November and December, with the population markedly declining by the end of December. This species, like *Scimnus*, may be univoltine; with larvae associated with margarodid or pseudococcid scales the rest of the year.

Meloidae. Two meloid species were found on *Z. simplex*. *Mylabris* sp. 1 occurred principally on *Z. simplex*; and was found from November – July. *Mylabris* sp. 2 was less common on *Z. simplex*, but more common on *P. salicornioides*. Meloids fed primarily on flower buds, but also at open flowers. They were active throughout midday, even on warm days; and were inactive on foggy mornings. *Mylabris* sp. 1 was much more common in the second study area than in the first; and disappeared from the latter after December.

Tenebrionidae. *Physadesmia globosa*, *Physosterna cribripes* and *Zophosis devexa* commonly foraged in leaf and seed litter beneath large plants. *Metriopus depressus* and *P. cribripes* were also found feeding on green foliage up in the plants.

3.2.2 Diptera

Cryptochaetidae. *Cryptochaetum mixtum* was reared from scales in June. Label information on specimens in the Natal Museum gives *„Aspidoproctus mirabilis* (Coccidae)" as a host. This fly is apparently not strictly host-specific either to the plant or the scale.

Bombyliidae. At least three species of *Cyrtosia* were commonly collected at flowers in the second study area. They were also numerous on the few plants growing in the Kuiseb River bed during the study period; but were rare at the first study site.

3.2.3 Hemiptera-Heteroptera

Lygaeidae. Adult *Geocoris* sp. were found on *Z. simplex* throughout the day from November through March. Activity was concentrated in the mornings and late afternoons. Adults mated on *Z. simplex*; but this species was also collected on *P. salicornioides*. Small nymphs (two instars) were collected in November, and larger instars in December, January and April.

An undetermined lygaeid species (Gen. 1) was collected from November through July. The population increased through March, then slowly declined. Bugs were found in equal numbers in the litter and up on the plants until February; but from mid-February, most of the population was in the litter. Large numbers of nymphs were feeding in the litter in March; and the noticeable decrease in April was probably due to predation (see Solifugae).

Rhopalidae. *Liorhyssus slateri* occurred on *Z. simplex* from November through July. Adults were also collected regularly from *C. capitata*. This species was active throughout the day, though moving down into the bush at mid-day as temperatures around the outer stems approached 40°C. *Liorhyssus* egg clusters were tabulated from stem samples, and the results are presented in Table 3. Most eggs were laid on leaves, but many were also on seed capsules. Few were deposited on stems. Nymphs representing several instars were found throughout November and December, but were not found regularly thereafter. This species is at least bivoltine, and possibly multivoltine.

Approximately half the *Liorhyssus* eggs examined contained scelionid parasitoids (*Telenomus* sp.).

3.2.4 Hemiptera-Homoptera

Cicadellidae. *Circulifer tenellus* was the major leafhopper on *Z. simplex*, but the possibility of other species being present cannot be excluded. Leafhoppers were active on the plant in the mornings and late afternoons, and inactive for several hours at midday

when temperatures around the apex of the stems reached 35°C. The majority of eggs were produced in December (Table 4), suggesting that the species is univoltine.

Cicadellid eggs were commonly parasitised by the mymarid *Gonatocerus* sp.

Coccoidea. Two scale species, apparently one margarodid and one pseudococcid, lived on the stems, usually at or below the soil surface. Nymphs could not be distinguished during sampling. Large numbers of crawlers were produced in January and late May. Thus both species are either bivoltine, or univoltine and producing eggs at different times of the year. Crawlers settled within a month, and were attacked by the fly *C. mixtum* and an encyrtid wasp (Gen 1.). In a June sample of 30 recently settled scales, less than 10 % was parasitised.

Psyllidae. There were no psyliids on *Z. simplex* in the first study area. Large numbers were found on plants at the second study site from February through July. Eggs, nymphs and adults were collected in most samples. Psyllids were attacked by an undescribed *Psyllaephagus* species, which generally emerged from late nymphal instars.

3.2.5 Hymenoptera (Aculeata)

The Terebrantia and Aculeata-Proctotrupoidea are discussed under their respective hosts.

Bethylidae. One species (Gen. 2) was found in November and December. It actively searched on stems, usually well down inside the bush. It also fed on flowers. One wasp captured a small lepidopteran larva and dragged it off the bush. During transport, the wasp walked backwards and sideways while holding the prey in its mandibles.

Formicidae. The ant *Anoplolepis steingroeveri* was very abundant in the second study area from February through July. From April through July, it was the dominant insect on *Z. simplex*, often interrupting foraging by other species by its aggressive behaviour. Ants were directly associated with margarodid scales; and lived in nests around the roots of the plant. Ants emerged from the nest by late morning and remained in the plants until late afternoon. Emergence and retirement times varied as much as two hours on successive days, and appeared to be temperature dependent.

Halictidae. Four bee species were distinguished in the field by differences in colour patterns, size and behaviour. All fed on *C. capitata* and *P. salicornioides* as well as *Z. simplex*. Two small species, one yellow and one gray, were present from November through February. Activity of the yellow species was concentrated at midday (up to 10 individuals per bush), with noticeably fewer in the mornings and late afternoons. The gray species was found in equal numbers (2–3 per

plex, but frequently searched for prey around the bases of the dead and dying plants. One *Miscophus* was also reared from a cocoon found in soil at the base of a dead *Z. simplex*. None of the sphecid species was restricted to *Z. simplex*.

Feeding by *Bembicinus*, *Bembix*, *Gastrosericus* and *Tachysphex* was concentrated at midday. *Bembix* feeding peaked between 13h00 and 13h30 on November 14th, with almost no feeding before 11h00 nor after 14h00. Feeding bouts per flower lasted 3,7 ± 2,6 sec (n = 24). Six *Bembicinus* were observed from 13h15 to 14h15 on February 26th. Four fed continually throughout the period, while the other two fed for 15 and 30 min. respectively.

Bembix did not search for prey on *Z. simplex*, but the other three dominant sphecids did. Only one prey capture was observed, but neither prey nor wasp could be captured for positive identification. *Bembicinus* hunted by hovering close to the edges of the plant; and only came onto the plant to feed or sit on the shaded sides of stems. *Gastrosericus*, however, spent much of its time crawling on the plant when not actually feeding at the flowers.

Bembix activity began earlier in the day and lasted longer than that of the other dominant sphecids. Aggressive behaviour in *Bembix* was directed primarily against *Oxybelus* and the Halictidae. Intraspecific aggression was also observed. *Bembix* repeatedly attacked other aculeates until the latter were driven off. The victims were often hit in flight and knocked to the ground.

3.2.6 Lepidoptera

Lycaenidae. Adults of *Freyeria trochilus* were found in the study area from November through May, actively feeding on the flowers of *Z. simplex*. Clark and Dickson (1971) list *Helichrysum* and *Indigofera* as hosts of this species. Since only three lycaenid larvae were found on the plants during the study period, it is unlikely that *Z. simplex* is a normal host. The large number of butterflies observed was apparently attracted to the plant only for feeding. *Freyeria* was much more common in the second study area than in the first.

Tinaegeriidae. Larvae of *Eretmocera fuscipennis* fed principally on the leaves of *Z. simplex*. Early instars feed inside the small, succulent leaves. Larger larvae construct retreats by tying together several leaves and seed capsules upon which they then feed. Several larvae were collected in December at the first study site. Stem counts from the second study site yielded nine full grown larvae on March 26th and 11 on April 26th. Only one larva was found in the May sample. Large numbers of adults were seen on the plants by July 9th. *Eretmocera* was parasitised by *Apanteles* sp. This braconid was active on *Z. simplex* from November through May, with an apparent peak in December. *Apanteles* fed, searched and mated on the plant. Activity was concentrated in the mornings, with nearly all wasps retreating into the bush and sitting on the undersides of leaves by noon. They did not appear to be active in the afternoons. One female was observed for one hour on March 16th. She flew erratically from stem to stem, occasionally feeding briefly at flowers. She probed several flower buds with her ovipositor.

3.2.7 Neuroptera

Chrysopidae. Two stalked eggs were found attached to leaves on November 14th. Only one adult and no larvae were seen during the study period.

3.2.8 Araneae

Oxyopidae. *Peucetia lucasii* was found on larger bushes in November. It is not host specific as one female was also found with an egg case on *C. capitata*. One female completed an egg case on *Z. simplex* on November 14th, and then was transferred to the laboratory with the plant. She refused food, and remained with the egg case until the eggs hatched, whereupon she died. The first hatchling appeared on November 27th, and the rest followed within 24 hours. Forty-four spiders emerged from the egg case.

Salticidae. Several species were collected on *Z. simplex*. A large, brown species (*Aelurillus* sp.) was most commonly encountered. It appeared to be restricted to *Z. simplex*. One female was found inside a fresh egg sac on April 25th. This species was observed attacking the melanoblossid *Lawrencega* on two occasions (one unsuccessful) by pouncing on the solifuge as it fed under a bush.

Thomisidae. *Thomisus schulzei* was present throughout the study period, though only in very small numbers. It was observed feeding on an halictid in January and a tinaegeriid adult in July.

3.2.9 Solifugae

Melanoblossidae. Immatures were frequently found around *Z. simplex* after February. Most were an undescribed *Lawrencega* species. A small lygaeid (Gen. 1) was the major prey item of these solifuges in the second study area.

Solpugidae. Immature *Solpugista bicolor* were seen throughout the study period. Although fewer individuals were seen around *Z. simplex*, this species appeared to have a wider diet than *Lawrencega*, with a less pronounced preference for lygaeids.

4 DISCUSSION

Of 43 resident species, few were actually restricted to *Z. simplex* (Table 1). A complete analysis is not

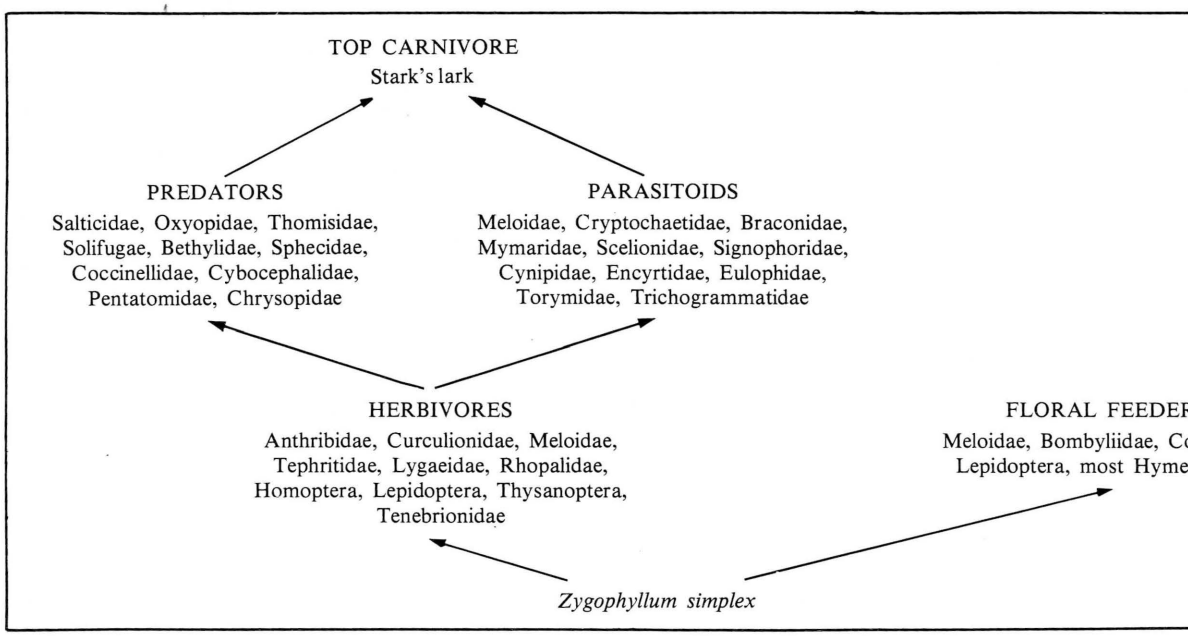

FIGURE 1: A simplified food chain showing relationships of major components of the *Zygophyllum simplex* community i Namib Desert.

possible, however, since the host specificity of the Homoptera and parasitoid Hymenoptera was not determined. Most of the species visiting the flowers of *Z. simplex* were also attracted to *C. capitata* and *P. salicornioides*. This emphasises the importance of floral morphology to generalised feeders since few of the species visiting these three plants were attracted to the tubular flowers of either *B. obmitrata* or *S. canescens*.

Species found on the stems and leaves (e.g. Coleoptera and Hemiptera) retreated into the cooler portions of the plant at midday. Differences in the timing of such activity on any given day suggest that some species (e.g. *Circulifer tenellus*) are more heat sensitive than others. Most of the aculeate Hymenoptera, on the other hand, concentrated their activity around midday. High midday temperatures may be responsible for the increased feeding activities of these species. It is also possible that nectar production increases during these periods. The very small size (2–3 mm) and pale colouration of the most active midday species (*Quartinioides* n. sp. 1 and *Halictus* (?) sp. 1) should be investigated as possible adaptations for increased heat tolerance.

A simplified food chain is presented in Fig. 1. Stark's lark (*Spizocorys starki*) was a major predator on insects and arachnids at the first study site in November and December. Birds went from one bush to another first picking off insects flying around the edges, then hopping into or onto the plant and eating other insects on the foliage.

Many of the *Z. simplex* insects could not be identified to species. This emphasises the great need for taxonomic work on Namibian invertebrates in general.

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study would not have been possible v assistance of the following taxonomists, t am most grateful: R. Bohart (Masaridae) penaar (Araneae), C. Eardley (Anthophorid dae, Lycaenidae, Sphecidae), S. Endrö (Cybocephalidae), U. Göllner-Scheiding, C and J. Slater (Rhopalidae), C. Griswold J. Hall (Bombyliidae), C. Jacot-Guillarmo dae), J. Londt (Cryptochaetidae), M. Mans dae), H. Munro (Tephritidae), G. Prinsl doidea, Cynipidae), J. Theron (Cicadellid Tonder (Anthribidae, Coccinellidae, Curcul L. Vari (Tinaegeriidae). I am particularly G. Prinsloo for handling and distributing my material. I also thank M. Seely for on the manuscript; and P. Waugh and for typing assistance. I acknowledge th Museum and the CSIR of South Africa assistance; and the Directorate of Natur tion, SWA/Namibia, for facilities and p work in the Namib-Naukluft Park.

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TABLE 1: Insect and arachnid fauna associated with *Zygophyllum simplex* L.

Residents[1] on plant	Residents in leaf and seed litter	Flower feeders[2]	Errant predators[3]	Host specifics[4]
COLEOPTERA	COLEOPTERA	COLEOPTERA	HYMENOPTERA	COLEOPTERA
Coccinellidae	Tenebrionidae	Meloidae	Bethylidae	Curculionidae
Rodolia sp.	*Physadesmia globosa* (Haag)	*Mylabris* spp. 1&2	Gen. 2	Gen. 1, sp. 1&2
Scimnus sp.	*Physosterna cribripes* (Haag)	DIPTERA	Sphecidae	Gen. 2
Curculionidae	*Zophosis devexa* Péringuey	Bombyliidae	*Bembicinus* sp. 1	Cybocephalidae
Gen. 1, sp. 1&2	HEMIPTERA-HETEROPTERA	*Cyrtosia* spp. 1–3	*Gastrosericus* sp.	*Cybocephalus* sp.
Gen. 2	Lygaeidae	Gen. 1	*Tachysphex* sp.	Meloidae
Cybocephalidae	Gen. 1	Conopidae	ARANEAE	*Mylabris* sp. 1
Cybocephalus sp.	Pentatomidae	*Physocephala* sp.	Salticidae	HEMIPTERA-HETEROPTERA
DIPTERA	Gen. 1	HYMENOPTERA	Gen. 2&3	Lygaeidae
Cryptochaetidae	HYMENOPTERA	Anthophoridae	Undet. sp. (immature)	Gen. 1
Cryptochaetum mixtum van Bruggen	Bethylidae	*Braunsapis* sp.	SOLIFUGAE	HYMENOPTERA
HEMIPTERA-HETEROPTERA	Gen. 1	*Ceratina* (?) sp.	Melanoblossidae	Masaridae
Lygaeidae	Formicidae	Bethylidae	*Lawrencega* sp.	*Quartinoides* sp. 1
Geocoris sp.	*A. steingroeveri*	Gen. 2		LEPIDOPTERA
Sweetocoris sp.	Sphecidae	Braconidae	Solpugidae	Tinaegeriidae
Gen. 1	*Miscophus* sp.	*Apanteles* sp.	*Solpugista bicolor* (Lawrence)	*E. fuscipennis* Zeller
Rhopalidae	THYSANURA	*Opius* sp.		
Liorhyssus slateri Göllner-Scheiding	Lepismatidae	Halictidae		
HEMIPTERA-HOMOPTERA	Gen. 1	*Halictus* (?) spp. 1–3		
Cicadellidae	ARANEAE	Gen. 1		
Circulifer tenellus (Baker)	Gen. 1	Masaridae		
Margarodidae		*Quartinioides* sp. 1		
Gen. 1		Pompilidae		
Pseudococcidae		spp. 1–4		
Gen. 1		Sphecidae		
Psyllidae		*Ammophila* sp.		
Gen. 1		*Bembicinus* sp. 1&2		
HYMENOPTERA		*Bembix* sp.		
Braconidae		*Cerceris* cf. *curvitarsus* Schletterer		
Apanteles sp.		*Gastrosericus* sp.		
Cynipidae		*Oxybelus* sp.		
Eucoilinae sp.		*Tachysphex* cf. *panzeri* Arnold		
Encyrtidae				
Psyllaephagus sp.				
Gen. 1				
Eulophidae				
Tetrastichus sp.		LEPIDOPTERA		
		Lycaenidae		
		F. trochilus (Freyer)		

Cont. overleaf

Table 1 cont.:

Residents[1] on plant	Residents in leaf and seed litter	Flower feeders[2]	Errant predators[3]	Host specifics[4]
Formicidae				
Anoplolepis steingroeveri (Forel)				
Mymaridae				
Gonatocerus sp.				
Pteromalidae				
Gen. 1				
Scelionidae				
Telenomus sp.				
Signiphoridae				
Gen. 1				
Torymidae				
Tarachodiphaga sp.				
Trichogrammatidae				
Gen. 1				
LEPIDOPTERA				
Lycaenidae				
Freyeria trochilus (Freyer)				
Tinaegeriidae				
Eretomocera fuscipennis Zeller				
NEUROPTERA				
Chrysopidae				
Gen. 1				
THYSANOPTERA				
Gen. 1&2				
ARANEAE				
Oxyopidae				
Peucetia lucasii (Vinson)				
Salticidae				
Aelurillus sp.				
Thomisidae				
Thomisus schultzei Simon				

[1] Species spending all or major portion of life cycle on *Z. simplex*.
[2] Species regularly feeding at or on flowers, few of which are residents.
[3] Non-resident predators regularly associated with plant.
[4] Species apparently restricted to *Z. simplex*.

TABLE 2: Insects recorded only once or twice on *Zygophyllum simplex* between November, 1978 and July, 1979.

COLEOPTERA
- Anthribidae
  - *Urodon* sp.
- Coccinellidae
  - Gen. 1
- Tenebrionidae
  - *Metriopus depressus* (Haag)

DIPTERA
- Bombyliidae
  - Gen. 2 and 3
- Muscidae
  - Gen. 1
- Sarcophagidae
  - Gen. 1.
- Tephritidae
  - *Leucothrix oryx* Munro
- Therevidae
  - Gen. 1

HEMIPTERA-HETEROPTERA
- Anthocoridae
  - Gen. 1
- Miridae
  - Gen. 1

HYMENOPTERA
- Apidae
  - *Apis mellifera* L.
- Bradynobaenidae
  - *Apterogyna* cf. *mnemosina* Péringuey
- Chalcididae
  - *Lasiochalcidia* sp.
- Chrysididae
  - Gen. 1, sp. 1 and 2
- Ichneumonidae
  - Anomalinae sp.
  - Campopleginae sp.
- Masaridae
  - *Quartinia* sp.
  - *Quartinioides* sp. 2 and 3
- Megachilidae
  - Gen. 1
- Pompilidae
  - sp. 5
- Sphecidae
  - Gen. 1–3

LEPIDOPTERA
- Geometridae
  - Gen. 1
- Microlepidoptera
  - Gen. 1
- Tortricidae
  - Gen. 1

NEUROPTERA
- Coniopterygidae
  - Gen. 1

TABLE 3: Eggs of *Liorhyssus slateri* from monthly stem counts of *Zygophyllum simplex* (N = 10 stems/month).

Month	Number of egg batches[1]	Locality
November	8	1st study site
December	15	1st study site
January	11	1st study site
February	0	2nd study site
March	18	2nd study site
April – July	0	2nd study site

[1] Empty batches not included. Usually 4–8 eggs per batch.

TABLE 4: Numbers of live cicadellid eggs from monthly stem counts of *Zygophullum simplex* (N = 10 stems/month).

Month	Number on leaves	Number on seed capsules	Number on stems	Totals
November	4	4	0	8
December	22	41	8	71
January	6	1	4	11
February	0	0	0	0
March	4	0	0	4
April	0	0	0	0
May	3	0	0	3
June	2	0	0	2