

The status of *Ricinoides plebejus* and a note on *R. afzelii* (Ricinulei, Arachnida)

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Ricinoides plebejus and *R. westermanni*

In 1904 Hansen and Sørensen produced their monumental work which described nine species of Ricinulei, five of which belonged to the African genus *Ricinoides* Ewing 1929. Their study included descriptions of *R. westermanni* (Guérin-Méneville 1838) and *R. plebejus* (Hansen and Sørensen 1904). The former species was based on a single male, the holotype, which is now lost (Tuxen 1974). However, Hansen and Sørensen (1904) described a further male specimen collected in Bismarcksburg, Togo by R. Büttner on 16 January 1893. This specimen, as Tuxen (1974) points out, must be considered a neotype. In addition to the males, Hansen and Sørensen also examined an "immature specimen" collected by Büttner in the same locality in July 1891. This specimen has since turned out to be a male tritonymph. A further specimen of *R. westermanni* came to light in a collection of ricinuleids belonging to the American Museum of Natural History (New York). This specimen was collected at Tafo in Ghana, 10 miles NNW of Koforidua (site of the West African Cocoa Research Institute), in August 1945 by A. H. Strickland. An examination of this specimen revealed that it too was a male tritonymph.

The species *R. plebejus* (Hansen and Sørensen 1904) was described on a single immature specimen from Togo, Misalishe, collected on 24 June 1894 by E. Baumann. An examination of this specimen revealed that it was a female tritonymph. The specimens of *R. westermanni* (with the exception of the latter mentioned tritonymph) and *R. plebejus* are the property of the Naturhistorisches Museum, Berlin.

It is clear from Table 1 that the four specimens examined are morphologically identical with regard to these characters (apart from the adult male which is, as to be expected, larger than the tritonymphs). It is therefore unlikely that *R. plebejus* is a true species. Tuxen (pers. comm.) was also suspicious of the status of *R. plebejus* and in his paper (1974) he refrained from giving a new description of the species which, as he put it "should await more material".

On the evidence I have put forward I therefore consider that *R. plebejus* is a junior subjective synonym and that the original specimen should be referred to the species *westermanni*.

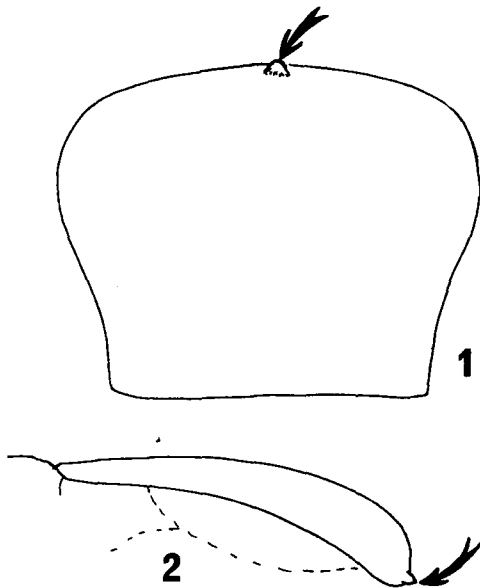
A note on *Ricinoides afzelii*

An examination of specimens of *Ricinoides afzelii* (Hansen and Sørensen 1904) revealed a useful taxonomic feature which has been omitted from earlier descriptions. The specimens examined included those collected by Pollock in 1964 at Bo, Sierra Leone (deposited in the British Museum (Natural History)) and those collected by Legg in the Botanical Garden of Fourah Bay College (University of Sierra Leone), Freetown in 1973. The feature (Fig. 1) is a median anterior dorsal knob on the cucullus which bears 2-4

Species	Stage	Sex	Length	Scales	Dorsal femoral grooves	Breadth/length of pedipalp tibia	Tuberculation of pedipalp tibia	Cheliceral setal formula	Location
<i>R. westermanni</i>	adult	♂	8.5	+	+	0.099	distal third long type;	1 + (6 + 2)	Togo
	tritonymph	♂	7.6	+	+	0.108	proximal two thirds many	1 + (6 + 2)	Togo
	tritonymph	♂	7.8	+	+	0.101	rounded type	1 + (6 + 2)	Ghana
<i>R. plebejus</i>	tritonymph	♀	7.6	+	+	0.102		1 + (6 + 2)	Togo

Table 1: Comparison of various characters of *R. westermanni* and *R. plebejus*

rounded tubercles. The structure was only present in the males examined, and absent from all the females.



Figs. 1-2: *Ricinoides afzelii*, male. Cucullus showing anterior knob. 1 Dorsal view; 2 Lateral view. Setae and tubercles omitted for clarity (they tend to mask the presence of the knob).

It is not too easy to see (hence it was overlooked by earlier workers) unless the cucullus is tilted (Fig. 2).

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