

Swarming of *Pleurophorus* beetles in a food court

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Subjects: *Pleurophorus* sp. (Insecta: Coleoptera: Scarabaeidae: Aphodiinae).

Subjects identified by: Paul Skelley.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Bishan, 504 Bishan Street 11; 18 October 2017; 2020 hrs.

Habitat: Urban. In a concrete building, within the premises of a food court.

Observers: Contributors

Observation: During the night, numerous *Pleurophorus* beetles were found scattered on the tables of the food court (see video by Sean Yap at https://youtu.be/GPwm1PR_O2k and Fig. 1 for a magnified view of a beetle). It appeared that they were swarming to the lights, and had landed on the tables.

By the next morning (19 October 2017), most of the beetles had disappeared except for the ones that have died on the floor. In the night, the beetles were again found found on the tables but comparatively fewer in numbers. The beetles are tiny, about 2.5 mm in body length (See Fig. 2).



Fig. 1. Lateral (top) and dorsal (bottom) views of a *Pleurophorus* beetle, against 1 mm scale bars. Note the granulated surface of the head. Photographs by Miteshravin s/o Ravindran

Remarks: The genus *Pleurophorus* contains some of the smaller scarab beetles, with body lengths that never exceed 15 mm (Skelley, 2008). They are very similar in appearance to the *Ataenius australasiae* that were found in very large numbers at Bukit Batok West in 2015. A quick way to distinguish these two beetles is to examine the surface texture of their convex heads - granulated on *Pleurophorus* (Fig. 1), but smooth on *Ataenius* (Smith & Skelley, 2007).

These *Pleurophorus* beetles are either detritivores or saprophages (Smith & Skelley, 2007), indicating that they may have originated from the field of grass in front of the food court. We have consulted Dr Paul Skelley on the identification of the beetles (personal communication, 30 October 2017). Although he is unable to confirm their specific identity, he suspects that they may be *Pleurophorus caesus*, a cosmopolitan species (see Smith & Skelley, 2007: 46).



Fig 2. Dead *Pleurophorus* beetles found on the floor of the food court. Size comparison with a Singapore 20 cent coin of 20 mm diameter. Photograph by Foo Maosheng

References:

Skelley, P. E., 2008. Aphodiinae. *Generic Guide to New World Scarab Beetles*.

<http://www.museum.unl.edu/research/entomology/Guide/Scarabaeoidea/Scarabaeidae/Aphodiinae/Aphodiinae-Overview/AphodiinaeO.html>. Accessed on 5 January 2018.

Smith, A. B. T. & P. E. Skelley, 2007. A review of the Aphodiinae (Coleoptera: Scarabaeidae) of southern South America. *Zootaxa*. 1458: 1-80.