

Ataenius australasiae beetles at Upper Bukit Timah

Foo Maosheng & Rie Chong

nhmfoom@nus.edu.sg (Foo)

Subjects: *Ataenius australasiae* (Insecta: Coleoptera: Scarabaeidae: Aphodiinae).

Subjects identified by: Foo Maosheng.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, 794 Upper Bukit Timah Road; 7 August 2018; around 1900 hrs.

Habitat: Urban. Among low-rise concrete buildings.

Observers: Rie Chong and others.

Observation: Rie Chong was having a family dinner at an open-air restaurant when she and members of her family noticed some small black beetles (Fig. 1) dropping onto the table and into their food from above. While flicking the beetles away from the food, they spotted more beetles on the floor around them (Fig. 2). It was estimated that there were around 50 individuals on the table and on the floor around them (a sample of these are shown in Fig. 3). Interestingly, only one other table beside theirs seemed to be affected by the beetles. Customers seated at the other tables within the restaurant seemed to be unaware of the presence of the beetles.

Remarks: *Ataenius australasiae* is known to be widely distributed, both in Australia and in South-East Asia (Stebnicka & Howden, 1997). This species was first known to be in Singapore when large numbers were reported by the residents of the highrise housing estate along Bukit Batok West Avenue 8 in 2015 (Khew, 2015).

These beetles are known to be saprophagous. They can be seen in damp vegetated areas, and are easily attracted to lights (Stebnicka & Howden, 1996). It is likely that the beetles featured here had been drawn to some of the lights hung above the dining tables.



Fig. 1 (right). A lateral (top) and dorsal (bottom) view *Ataenius australasiae* beetles, with 1 mm scale bar. Photograph by Siti Maimon Binte Hussin.



Fig 2. *Ataenius australasiae* beetles scattered on the floor of an open-air restaurant. Photograph by Rie Chong



Fig 3. The size of the *Ataenius australasiae* beetles in comparison to a Singapore 10 cents coin. Photograph by Foo Maosheng

References:

- Khew, C., 2015. Bukit Batok bug a harmless beetle. The Straits Times (online edition). 3 May 2015. www.asiaone.com/singapore/bukit-batok-bug-harmless-beetle.
- Stebnicka, Z. T. & H. F. Howden, 1996. Australian genera and species in the tribes Odontolochini, Psammodiini, Rhyparini, Stereomerini and part of the Eupariini (Coleoptera: Scarabaeoidea: Aphodiinae). *Invertebrate Taxonomy*. 10: 97–170.
- Stebnicka, Z. T. & H. F. Howden, 1997. Revision of the Australian species of *Ataenius* Harold (Coleoptera: Scarabaeoidea: Aphodiinae: Eupariini). *Invertebrate Systematics*. 11 (5): 735-821.