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A REVIEW OF THE COCKROACHES, MANTIDS AND PHASMIDS FROM NIAH NATIONAL PARK, SARAWAK (INSECTA: BLATTODEA, MANTODEA, & PHASMIDA)


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ABSTRACT

Niah National Park is famous for its archaeology in the cave complex. The natural history of the park has been largely overlooked. The existing records of cockroaches, mantids and phasmids are reviewed and found to be sparse: two cockroach species recorded by Roth, 16 phasmids recorded by Bragg, and two by Seow-Choen. There are no published records of mantids from Niah. A brief survey of Niah was carried out in June 2024, with emphasis on mantids and cockroaches. The published records are summarised and new data are presented, bringing the species totals to 25 phasmids, 25 cockroaches and 11 mantids. Three species of cockroach were found in the Great Cave, and 21 species in the forest. The cockroach *Pseudophoraspis emarginata* Hanitsch, 1923 is confirmed as a synonym of *Rhicnoda natatrix* Shelford, 1907. Some additional distribution data is provided for two species of phasmids: *Asceles inquinatus* Redtenbacher, 1908 and *Asceles moricula* (Redtenbacher, 1908).

Keywords: Niah National Park, Mantodea, Phasmida, Blattodea



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INTRODUCTION

Alfred Everett explored the Niah Caves in his 1878-9 survey (Everett, 1880) and, although he recorded mammal bones from these explorations, there is no mention of cockroaches, phasmids, or mantids in his report. Everett does not record any insects at Niah, but he did collect insects and other animals elsewhere in Borneo; he has a number of animals named after him, including a phasmid: *Lonchodes everetti* (Kirby, 1896), a mantis: *Hierodula everetti* Kirby, 1904, and a cockroach: *Rhabdoblatta everetti* (Hanitsch, 1931).

Prior to the discovery of archaeological artefacts in Niah Caves by Harrison in 1954 there was no significant interest in the caves and apparently no natural history collections were made in the area. Since the publication of Harrison's early discoveries (Harrison, 1957) there have been numerous expeditions to the cave to investigate the archaeology of the caves. Although there are no published records of archaeological expeditions collecting insects at Niah, there is a specimen of the phasmid *Hoploclonia cuspidata* in the Sarawak Museum which was collected at Niah Caves on 19.v.1959 by H.K.S.; as there was an expedition to the cave in 1959, it is likely that this specimen was collected by someone associated with the ongoing archaeological work.

During the 1990s I was visiting Borneo frequently to collect phasmids as part of my PhD research on the Phasmids of Borneo. I was encouraged to collect in the Sarawak National Parks by Abang Hamid of the Sarawak Forestry Department; his reasoning was that I would be able to "tell us what species we have". I visited Niah National Park briefly in 1992 and 1994.

In January 2024 together with my partner, we visited Niah caves and had a chance meeting with Mohd Sherman Sauffi William, an archaeologist from the Sarawak Museum. We discussed the application for World Heritage Status for the park and the fact that the park's wildlife has been largely overlooked. As a result of the discussion a detailed literature search was conducted for records of cockroaches, mantids and phasmids. The only published records of these groups of insects are for two species of cockroach (Roth, 1980 & 1988), and my own published records for 16 species of phasmids (Bragg, 1995, 1998, & 2001), and two phasmid records published by Seow-Choen (2019). In view of the paucity of records, Niah National Park was revisited in June 2024 to investigate the cockroaches and mantids in the park. During this visit I was accompanied by John Loach and we spent five nights at Niah.