

# Millipede family added to Australian fauna

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This image shows a *Nephopyrgodesmus eungella* male, one of the newly found species. Credit: Robert Mesibov

An entire group of millipedes previously unknown in Australia has been discovered by a specialist – on museum shelves. Hundreds of tiny specimens of the widespread tropical family Pyrgodesmidae have been found among bulk samples in two museums, showing that native pyrgodesmids are not only widespread in Australia's tropical and subtropical forests, but are also abundant and diverse. The study has been published in the open access journal *ZooKeys*.

"Most pyrgodesmid species are so small they could be easily

overlooked," explained millipede specialist Dr Robert Mesibov, of the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston, Tasmania.

"What's interesting is how thoroughly overlooked they've been. We now know there are dozens of [native species](#) of these millipedes in our warm, wet forests, stretching over more than 2000 km on Australia's east coast."



This image shows the top (left) and bottom (right) views of the head end of one of the new *pyrgodesmid* species. This millipede is only 1.3 mm wide. Credit: Robert Mesibov

Six new species and three new genera of the colorful, curiously sculptured [millipedes](#) have now been described from Australia, all from the state of Queensland.

"It's a great example of the value of museum collections," said Dr Mesibov. "Scientists from the Queensland Museum and CSIRO Entomology collected bagfuls of [leaf litter](#) in hundreds of places over many years. They extracted bugs in bulk from the fresh litter and took out just the ones they were studying, usually [beetles](#). The remaining bugs are in 'residues' stored in the Queensland Museum and the Australian National Insect Collection."

Dr Mesibov said it's not generally appreciated that zoological specialists find most of their new species in museums. "Sure, biological expeditions

to previously unexplored places turn up exciting new species. But there are plenty of surprises waiting when you go rummaging through the residues on museum shelves. In this case, it was a whole family of animals not known from Australia."

**More information:** Mesibov R (2012) The first native Pyrgodesmidae (Diplopoda, Polydesmida) from Australia. ZooKeys 217: 63. [doi: 10.3897/zookeys.217.3809](https://doi.org/10.3897/zookeys.217.3809)

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