

The mysterious scarab beetles: Two new species of the endangered ancient genus *Gyronotus*

22 October 2013



This image shows a living *G. Perissinottoi* in its natural habitat. Credit: Lynette Clennell

Famous as the sacred beetles of ancient Egypt the scarab beetle group in fact represents much greater diversity around the globe. Some of the most vulnerable representatives are contained in the flightless genus *Gyronotus*, which currently includes six known species. A recent study published in the open access journal [Zookeys](#) describes two new species with unusual distribution from southern Africa.

The two new [species](#) *G. perissinottoi* and *G. schuelei* both dwell in grasslands/savannas, while most of the other known species in the [genus](#) exhibit a preference for forest habitats. *G. perissinottoi* occurs in a small but biodiversity unique area in southern KwaZulu-Natal, in the beautiful Umthamvuna Nature Reserve. The second species, *G. schuelei* originates from western Swaziland and is currently known only

from two specimens.

The representatives of the genus *Gyronotus* as well as several other genera of the tribe Canthonini, are regarded among the most endangered of the African Scarabaeinae because of their sensitivity to disturbance. Apart from *G. glabrosus* and the two newly described [beetles](#), *Gyronotus* species are linked to coastal and low-lying forest habitats, which have undergone massive transformation during the past 50 years, through clearance, degradation and fragmentation.



This image shows a grassland landscape at the margin of the riverine forest of the Umthamvuna Nature Reserve, where *G. Perissinottoi* is found. Credit: Lynette Clennell



This image shows the second new species *G. schuelei*.
Credit: Mickaël François

"The genus *Gyronotus* is part of the tribe Canthonini, which has long been recognised as a relict of the ancient supercontinent Gondwanaland. Members of the genus are also wingless and particularly vulnerable to environmental disturbance. Thus, they are undoubtedly of substantial biodiversity and conservation value, with status ranging from vulnerable to critically endangered," comment the authors of the study Dr. Moretto and Dr. Perissinotto.

More information: Moretto P, Perissinotto R (2013) Description and ecology of two new species of *Gyronotus* van Lansberge, 1874 (Coleoptera, Scarabaeidae) from southern Africa. *ZooKeys* 344: 73. [DOI: 10.3897/zookeys.344.6101](https://doi.org/10.3897/zookeys.344.6101)

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