NERTHRA FUSCIPES, A TOAD BUG (HEMIPTERA: GELASTOCORIDAE) NEW TO THE USA, ESTABLISHED IN FLORIDA

SUSAN E. HALBERT[1] AND JOSEPH E. EGER[2]
[1]Florida State Collection of Arthropods, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Plant Industry, P.O. Box 147100, Gainesville, FL 32614-7100

[2]Dow AgroSciences LLC, 2606 S. Dundee St., Tampa, FL 33629

A toad bug, identified as *Nerthra fuscipes* (Guérin-Méneville) (Fig. 1), was found in Brandon, FL (Hillsborough County) on 7 VIII 2003 by Gabrielle Gamester, a USDA/APHIS/PPQ inspector. The identification was confirmed by Jade Allen, (Doctor of Plant Medicine, University of

Fig. 1. *Nerthra fuscipes* (Guérin-Méneville). The bug is about 1 cm long. (photo: David Ziesk)

Florida) and by Dr. John T. Polhemus, Colorado Entomological Museum. The first specimen was found in the flowerbed of a restaurant. Near the restaurant, there was a persistently wet drainage area that appeared to be ideal habitat for toad bugs. A subsequent survey of the area in Nov of the same year failed to turn up any more *N. fuscipes*, so it was thought that the single record may have been a chance interception, or perhaps a hitchhiker with the mulch used for the flower beds at the restaurant.

In 2007, four additional specimens were collected in the city of Tampa (Hillsborough County) by the junior author (30 VI 2007, 21 X 2007, 20 XI 2007, 4 VII 2008). Another specimen was spotted by the junior author in Riverview on 13 VIII 2007 but escaped capture. These finds and sighting strongly suggest that *N. fuscipes* is established in Hillsborough County, Florida. Captured specimens are deposited in the Florida State Collection of Arthropods (FSCA).

Nerthra fuscipes is known from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Colombia, Brazil, and Puerto Rico (Todd 1955). Little is known about the biology of these bugs. Apparently, they are predaceous in aquatic or semi-aquatic habitats, although some *Nerthra* spp. can be found far from water (Epler 2006). All of our specimens were collected in urban landscapes, sidewalks or driveways. These bugs are not known to be of any economic importance anywhere. *Nerthra* spp. are collected rarely, probably because of cryptic habits and coloration.

The genus *Nerthra* can be separated from *Gelastocoris*, the only other Florida genus of toad bugs, by the greatly enlarged front femora and the absence of distinct tarsal segments (Slater & Baranowski 1978). Three species of *Nerthra* now are known from Florida, including *Nerthra rugosa* (Desjardins), *Nerthra stygica* Say, and *N. fuscipes*. *Nerthra fuscipes* is the only one that does not have fused hemelytra. Additionally, *N. fuscipes* is larger than either of the other 2 species. The smallest of the *N. fuscipes* in the FSCA measure 9.1 mm body length (range = 9.1-10.9 mm; mean = 10.0; n = 18, including 5 from Florida). *Nerthra stygipes* averages 6.8 mm body length (range = 6.0 - 7.9; n = 4, all from Florida), and *N. rugosa* averages 5.6 mm (range = 5.5 - 5.6 mm; n = 2, including 1 specimen from Florida). Separation of *N. fuscipes* from closely related exotic species may require examination of male genitalia (Todd 1955).

Summary

An exotic toad bug, *Nerthra fuscipes* (Guérin-Méneville), was found for the first time in the USA in the Tampa Bay area. Several additional specimens have been found, indicating that the insect is established in Florida.

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