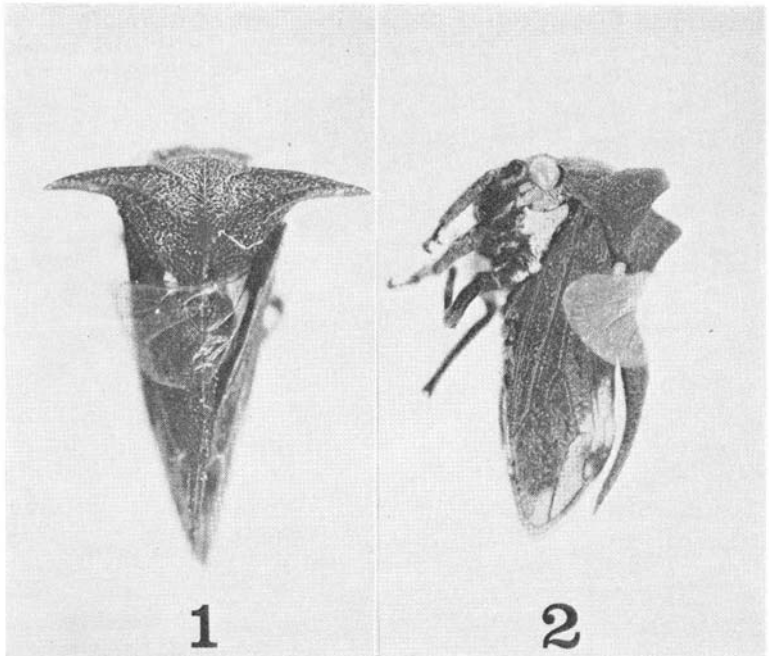


THE FAMILY MEMBRACIDAE (HOMOPTERA)
PRESENT IN NEW ZEALAND

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Members of the family Membracidae, the tree hoppers, are easily recognised by the greatly enlarged pronotum, which always extends beyond the scutellum and is prolonged backwards over the abdomen. The portion above the thorax is often grotesquely elevated with spine-, wedge- and horn-like processes, and in some species there are posterior elevated processes.

There are 55 species of Membracidae in Australia (Woodward, Evans and Eastop 1970). It was believed that the family was not present in New Zealand (Evans 1966; Eyles 1970); certainly, no endemic species have been collected. In May, however, a population apparently of the Australian species *Acanthucus trispinifer* (Fairmaire 1846) was found on the West Coast, abundant on broom and *Cotoneaster*.



Figs. 1-2: Female, from Kokiri. Fig 1 dorsal view. Fig 2 lateral view showing shape of median process.

A single female (figs 1 and 2) was collected at Kokiri, Westland Province, on broom and *Cotoneaster*, during May 1971, by A. McKenzie. It is brown in colour, 5.6mm long and 4.3mm wide across pronotal horns. It exhibits the sinuate median (or posterior) pronotal process with an anterior elevation (characteristic of *Acanthucus*) which is thorn shaped (characteristic of *A. trispinifer*). *A. trispinifer* is widely distributed in Australia, where however, the food plant is unknown (Evans 1966).

Some species of Membracidae are attended by ants whilst others are not, and some species are attended by ants in one part of a country but not another (Funkhouser 1917). Where ants are in attendance it is a mutual relationship, the ants feeding on usually nymphal excretions solicited by caressing the anal tube with their antennae, and giving in return protection to the membracid from predators (Funkhouser 1917; Wheeler 1960). Two questions come to mind concerning *A. trispinifer*: first is this species ant-attended? second, if so, is it ant-attended in Australia and not in New Zealand or vice versa, or in both countries?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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