

Clarification of cockroach names; *Platyzosteria* not *Maoriblatta*

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Aotearoa New Zealand has two endemic species of lowland kekerengu cockroach with dark almost black colouration that were formerly assigned to the genus *Polyzosteria* (*Platyzosteria*) Brunner von Wattenwyl 1865 (Shelford 1909; Caudell 1927; Tillyard 1926; Princis 1957; Johns 1966, 1970). In 1966 Kārlis Princis erected a new genus: *Maoriblatta* (Princis 1966a) primarily based on the presence and size of pulvilli (pads on the tarsi) and small tegmina. Princis placed five species in this genus (Table 1), two from New Zealand mainland (Princis 1966a, 1966b), one each from Chatham Islands (Princis 1966a), New Caledonia (Prince 1974) and Western Australia (Prince 1966b). This treatment was adopted by some including, most recently, the citizen science database iNaturalist (www.inaturalist.org) which reflects the taxonomy reported on the Cockroach Species File database (Beccaloni, 2025). However, in the year following Princis' 1966 proposal, Mackerras (1967a, b) returned these two New Zealand kekerengu species to *Platyzosteria*: *P. novaeseelandiae* Brunner von Wattenwyl, 1865 (Figure 1) and *P. rufoterminalata* Brunner von Wattenwyl, 1865, and this treatment was adopted by New Zealand entomologists (Johns 1970; Chinn 2004). We recommend following Mackerras (1967) and that this classification be recognised by the Cockroach Species File database (Beccaloni, 2025).

The Australian entomologist Mabel Josephine (Jo) Mackerras undertook an extensive revision of Australian Blattidae including consideration of genus *Platyzosteria* for which she proposed three subgenera; *Platyzosteria*, *Melanozosteria*, *Leptozosteria* and included the New Zealand species *P. novaeseelandiae* and *P. rufoterminalata* within subgenus *Melanozosteria*. These subgenera have sometimes been informally elevated to generic status (e.g. Bourguignon et al. 2018) resulting in additional nomenclatural

confusion, but the phylogenetic evidence currently available does not resolve monophyly for either *Platyzosteria* nor *Melanozosteria* within the genus *Platyzosteria* (Djernæs & Murienne 2022; Malem et al. 2023). Many of the species placed by Mackerras into subgenus *Melanozosteria* have a dark thorax (Figure 1, Mackerras 1967b), but exoskeleton melanism is not a phylogenetically informative trait (Djernæs & Murienne 2022; Malem et al. 2023) and the tegmina and pulvilli of the metatarsus as described by Princis (1966a) are not unique to *Maoriblatta*. Although the tribe Polyzosteriini erected by Frances Ann (Andi) McKittrick (1964) is well supported by genetic data, geographic location of these cockroaches is more likely to be phylogenetically informative than colour (Malem et al. 2023).

In addition to the systematic considerations, the name is considered inappropriate by some authors who have inferred that “*Maoriblatta*” associates the colour of this insect with the skin colour of an ethnic group (Veale et al. 2019). The common name might once have (Miller 1952), and although the genus description makes no mention of colour we recommend following Mackerras (1967).



Figure 1. *Platyzosteria novaeseelandiae*. Adult female from Hukatere Northland, New Zealand

Table 1. Cockroach species placed in the genus *Maoriblatta* Princis 1966a , 1966b

Specific name and author	Location	Original genus	Subsequent changes
<i>albipalpis</i> Chopard, 1924	New Caledonia	<i>Polyzosteria</i> Burmeister, 1838	<i>Maoriblatta</i> Princis 1974
<i>brunni</i> Alfken, 1901	Chatham Islands	<i>Platyzosteria</i> Brunner von Wattenwyl, 1865	<i>Celatoblatta</i> Johns 1966 Princis 1966b
<i>laevipennis</i> Chopard, 1924	New Caledonia	<i>Platyzosteria</i> Brunner von Wattenwyl, 1865	<i>Maoriblatta</i> Cockroach species file. Part of New Caledonian <i>Polyzosteria</i> clade
<i>novae-zeelandiae</i> Brunner von Wattenwyl, 1865	New Zealand	<i>Polyzosteria</i> (<i>Platyzosteria</i>) Brunner von Wattenwyl, 1865	<i>Platyzosteria</i> Mackerras 1967b Johns 1970
<i>rufoterminata</i> Brunner von Wattenwyl, 1865	New Zealand	<i>Polyzosteria</i> (<i>Platyzosteria</i>) Brunner von Wattenwyl, 1865	<i>Platyzosteria</i> Mackerras 1967b Johns 1970
<i>sublobata</i> Princis, 1954	Western Australia	<i>Lamproblatta</i> Hebard, 1919	<i>Platyzosteria</i> Mackerras 1967b

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