
A Cave Obligate Harvestman

Speleomaster lexi

Arachnida — Opiliones — Cladonychiidae

CONSERVATION STATUS / CLASSIFICATION

Rangewide: Critically imperiled/Imperiled (G1G2)
Statewide: Critically imperiled (S1)
ESA: No status
USFS: Region 1: No status; Region 4: No status
BLM: No status
IDFG: Not classified

BASIS FOR INCLUSION

Idaho endemic; restricted distribution.

TAXONOMY

Specimens were first described as a new species in 1974. *Speleomaster lexi* is the type species of the genus *Speleomaster* (Briggs 1974).

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

Speleomaster lexi is an Idaho endemic species known from a single lava-tube cave complex in Lincoln County (Briggs 1974). The distribution of populations within the complex is not known, but the species may be restricted to a limited area of suitable habitat; individuals are rarely encountered (Riggs 1994).

POPULATION TREND

No information is available to suggest population trend. Riggs (1994) conducted 8 visits to various caves in the T-maze system in Lincoln County, near Shoshone, between December 1983 and August 1984. He observed only 3 phalangids, none of which were positively identified as *S. lexi*, and he reported that “phalangids appear to be very reclusive creatures. The chances of observing 1 or more individuals at a time is small and this makes estimating the population very difficult.”

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

The specimens were found in (1) a lava cave “under breakdown in soil floor of room near surface, 13.5 °C” and (2) a “low room 50-100 meters inside entrance, 5-8 °C estimated temperature” (Briggs 1974).

Riggs (1994) found a juvenile phalangid in Maze Cave on a fairly smooth wall that was visibly coated with water. However, a positive identification of the species was not made. He did not comment on the habitat associated with the 2 phalangids found in Gwendolyn Extension, but he did report that this area had a tremendous population of invertebrates including large numbers of cave-adapted crickets.

ISSUES

Threats are unknown, but any activity that might negatively disrupt the environment in the lava tube cave would be considered a threat.

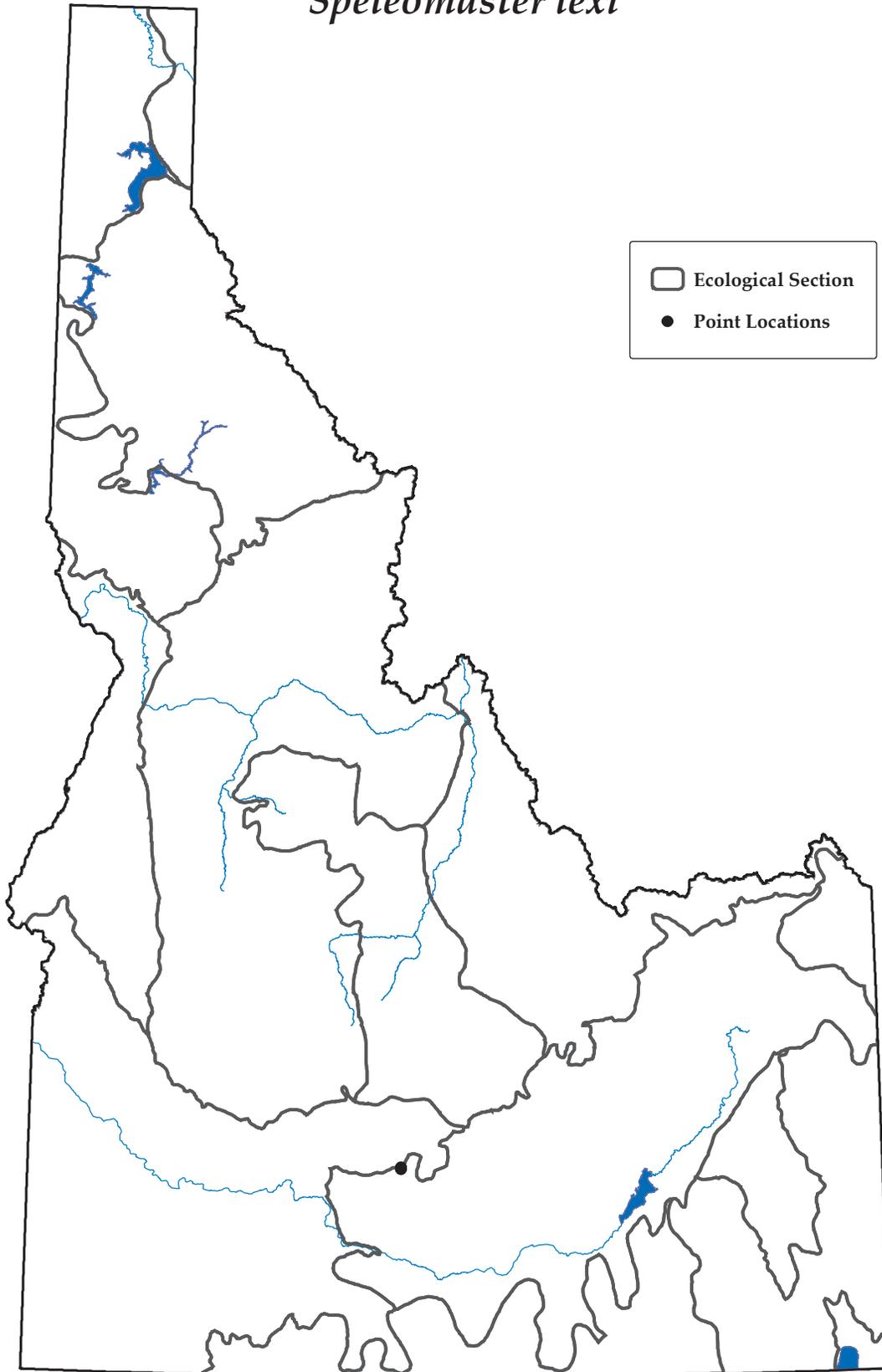
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Within the cave complex from which this species was described, efforts are needed to discern which caves harbor *S. lexi* for purposes of monitoring and protection. Additional surveys in other lava tube caves on the Snake River Plain should be conducted to better define the distributional extent of this species.

Although experienced spelunkers are generally aware of the fragility of cave environments, lava-tube caves are popular with inexperienced spelunkers and are susceptible to both unintentional damage and vandalism. Particular efforts are needed to protect the habitat occupied by this species.

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2 August 2005
Point data are from Idaho Conservation Data Center,
Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

