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SPECIES COMPOSITION OF THE *CULICOIDES* FAUNA IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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Culicoides spp. are small nematoceros biological vectors of pathogens of veterinary and medical importance, including the viruses of bluetongue, African horse sickness and epizootic hemorrhagic disease. The genus *Culicoides* consists of more than 1400 species, out of which about 30 have been implicated as a vector of viruses and other pathogens. In the Republic of Macedonia there were two major bluetongue outbreaks (in 2001 and 2014) and the *Culicoides* involved in the transmission of this disease were never investigated. Hence, the *Culicoides* monitoring to determine the potential vectors, species diversity and abundance in Macedonia was started in 2016. This text provides a checklist of the *Culicoides* spp. from Macedonia collected during 2016 and 2017. Using suction light traps the collections were performed on seven cattle dairy farms. The sampling was carried out twice per month for two consecutive nights (May-October) and once per month for one night (November-April). The collected *Culicoides* were identified according to the previously described wing patterns of the females and the genital morphology of the males. A group of females morphologically identified as *Culicoides obsoletus/Culicoides scoticus* were identified to separate species level by conventional PCR. Overall, 264 collections were performed and a total of 140,663 *Culicoides* were identified. The identified *Culicoides* belonged to 15 species/groups: *Culicoides obsoletus* s.l./*Culicoides scoticus*, *Culicoides imicola*, *Culicoides pulicaris*, *Culicoides punctatus*, *Culicoides newsteadi*, *Culicoides circumscriptus*, *Culicoides flavipulicaris*, *Culicoides dewulfi*, *Culicoides bysta*, *Culicoides lupicaris*, *Culicoides paradoxalis*, *Culicoides fagineus/Culicoides impunctatus*, *Culicoides odibilis* gp, *Culicoides nubeculosus/riethi/puncticollis* and *Culicoides* without wing pattern). *Culicoides obsoletus* s.l./*Culicoides scoticus* were the most abundant species with predominance of *Culicoides obsoletus* s.l. over *Culicoides scoticus*.

Key words: *Culicoides*, vector species, Macedonia