The Fauna of Sri Lanka:

Status of Taxonomy, Research and Conservation

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Current Taxonomic Status of Ants (Hymenoptera: Formicidae) in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The paper highlights the status of research on ants of Sri Lanka, based on published information and ongoing research of the author. A total of 181 ant species in 61 genera have been recorded from Sri Lanka, which includes the endemic and relict monotypic genus *Aneuretus*. Majority of the ant species recorded from Sri Lanka belong to the subfamily Myrmicinae. The Genus *Camponotus* (Formicinae) includes the highest number of ant species recorded so far in the island.

Key words: *Ants, Species, Distribution, Research*

An overview of past research on ants of Sri Lanka

Ants are a very common group of insects in most terrestrial habitats in Sri Lanka. Their habitats vary from highly disturbed urbanized areas to undisturbed forests. They inhabit buildings and outdoors, their microhabitats extend into soil (even up to a depth of 20 cm) decaying wood, plants, trees, litter, termite nests etc. Bingham (1903) was one of the very first to publish a list and descriptions of ant species recorded from Sri Lanka. This publication provides identification keys to the species. The past five decades has seen several publications on taxonomic work on ants in Sri Lanka (Bolton and Belshaw, 1987; Dorow and Kohout, 1995; Jayasooriya and Traniello, 1985; Wilson, 1964; Wilson et al., 1956). A revival of taxonomic work on ants of Sri Lanka in recent times began with the work initiated by the author in 2000. A preliminary taxonomic study of the ants collected from the premises of the Kelaniya University (Gampaha District) was carried out (Dias and Chaminda, 2000; Dias et al., 2001) and this work was later extended to areas in the Districts of Gampaha, Colombo, Ratnapura and Galle (Dias and Chaminda, 2001; Chaminda and Dias, 2001).

The subfamilies, genera and species of ants identified during these studies are listed in the Tables 1 and 2. The absence of a given subfamily, genus or species in a given district does not indicate that the particular taxa are actually absent in the area as ants were not collected from each and every site in a district. Field and laboratory methods for the study of ants and a list of ants held in the Reference Insect collection of the Department of National Museums, Colombo is given in Dias (2002a, 2002b).

Ant Diversity and their distribution in Sri Lanka

According to the currently accepted classification of ants by Bolton (1994), ants belonging to ten subfamilies have been recorded from Sri Lanka (Table 1). The provisional checklist of ants documented from Sri Lanka given in Appendix 1 is based on Bolton (1995), specimens deposited at the National Museums, Colombo and recent field studies by the author. Certain generic and species names appearing in this list are different from those of Dias (2002) due to the updating of taxonomic names according to Bolton (1995). Fifty six genera of ants have been recorded from Sri Lanka by Bolton (1995). Our studies added five more genera namely *Aphaenogaster* Mayr, *Cardiocondyla* Emery, *Ochetellus, Prenolepis* Mayr and *Protanilla* Taylor to the ant fauna of the country. Although the genus *Leptanilla* (subfamily Leptanillinae) has not been recorded from the recent field study, it is recorded by Bolton (1995) as being present in Sri Lanka.

Currently, a total of 181 ant species in 61 genera have been recorded from Sri Lanka (Table 1 and Appendix 1) and includes the endemic and relict monotypic genus *Aneuretus*. Majority of the ant species recorded from Sri Lanka belong to the subfamily Myrmicinae (75 spp,), followed by Formicinae (49 spp.) and Ponerinae (30 spp.). The Genus *Camponotus* (Formicinae) includes the highest number of ant species (22) recorded so far.

Table 1: A summary of the taxonomic diversity of ants of Sri Lanka, based on information gathered up to 2004.

Subfamily	Genera	Species
Aenictinae	01	05
Aneuretinae	01	01
Cerapachyinae	01	05
Dolichoderinae	04	09
Dorylinae	01	01
Formicinae	12	49
Myrmicinae	24	75
Ponerinae	13	30
Pseudomyrmecinae	01	04
Leptanillinae	02	02
Total	61	181

Worker ants belonging to 58 species in 39 genera and ten subfamilies collected from the Districts of Gampaha, Colombo, Ratnapura and Galle were identified (Table 2). Ant subfamilies that were common to the four districts were Dolichoderinae, Formicinae, Myrmicinae, Pseudomyrmecinae and Ponerinae. Among the dolichoderines, *Tapinoma* and *Technomyrmex* were common in all the four districts. The formicines *Anoplolepis gracilipes, Camponotus, Paratrechina* and *Oecophylla smaragdina* and the myrmicines, *Crematogaster, Pheidologeton, Monomorium, Pheidole, Meranoplus bicolor, Lophomyrmex* and *Solenopsis* were common in all four districts. The Pseudomyrmecine, *Tetraponera* and the ponerines, *Diacamma, Odontomachus* and *Hypoponera* were also common in the four districts. *Pachycondyla* was found in all three districts except Colombo district. The sole living representative of the Subfamily Aneuretinae, *Aneuretus simoni* was found only in the Ratnapura District and the cerapachyine, *Cerapachys* was collected from Maimbula forest (Gampaha District) only. Worker ants belonging to the genus *Aenictus* was collected from Gampaha, Ratnapura and Galle districts. So far, *Polyrhachis rastellata* was recorded only from Colombo District and a single specimen of *Strumigenys* was collected from Galle District. Several unidentified species belonging to six genera *(Crematogaster, Cerapachys, Myrmicaria, Anochetus, Leptogenys, Myrmoteras* and *Cataulacus)* were collected from the forest reserves.

The field surveys enabled the identification of micro-habitats preferred by certain ant species. *Aenictus* and most ponerines were found in the leaf litter, while *Aneuretus simoni* inhabited the leaf litter and associated soil. Species of the genera *Tetraponera* and *Crematogaster* occurred in vegetation. *Monomorium* was generally found indoors. *Dorylus* and *Lophomyrmex* were found both indoors and outdoors, indicating that they are generalists. *Protanilla* occurred in soil.

Recent research (Dias and Chaminda, 2001; Perera, 2003; Perera and Dias, 2003; Perera and Dias, 2004 collection) showed that the single living representative species (*Aneuretus simoni* – Plate 1) of the Subfamily Aneuretinae recorded only from Sri Lanka (Bolton, 1995) inhabits the city - reservoir associated forest ("Pompekelle") in Ratnapura. Its density in a selected region of this forest was 7 m^{-2}. This species has been found in the Gilimale forest too. It is listed as globally threatened (IUCN, 2004).

Table 2: Ants recorded from University of Kelaniya premises, areas in Gampaha, Colombo, Ratnapura and Galle Districts

Species	**Kelaniya**	**Gampaha**	**Colombo**	**R'pura**	**Galle**
Aenictinae					
Aenictus sp.		X			X
Aneuretinae					
Aneuretus simoni				X	
Cerapachyinae					
Cerapachys sp.		X			
Dolichoderinae					
Tapinoma melanocephalum	X		X	X	
Tapinoma indicum				X	X
Technomyrmex bicolor	X				
Technomyrmex elatior	X				
Tapinoma sp.	X	X		X	X
Technomyrmex sp.	X		X	X	X
Dolichoderus sp.	X	X		X	
Dorylinae					
Dorylus orientalis		X			
Dorylus sp.					X
Formicinae					
Anoplolepis gracilipes	X	X		X	
Oecophylla smaragdina	X	X	X	X	X
Paratrechina longicornis	X	X	X	X	
Camponotus sp.	X	X	X	X	X
Paratrechina sp.	X	X	X	X	X
Polyrhachis sp.	X	X		X	
Prenolepis sp	X		X		
Polyrachis rastellata			X		
Lepisiota sp.				X	
Myrmoteras sp.				X	
Acropyga sp.					X
Myrmicinae					
Pheidologeton diversus	X			X	
Monomorium destructor	X				
Monomarium floricola	X		X		
Meranoplus bicolor	X	X	X	X	X
Pheidole spathifera	X				
Solenopsis geminata	X	X	X	X	X
Lophomyrmex quadrispinosus	X	X	X		
Lophomyrmex spp.	X			X	X
Crematogaster spp.	X	X			

Pheidole spp.	X	X	X		X
Pheidologeton spp.	X	X	X		X
Tetramorium sp.		X	X	X	
Monomarium spp.			X	X	X
Crematogaster Sp.1				X	X
Crematogaster Sp.2				X	
Crematogaster Sp.3				X	
Crematogaster Sp.4				X	
Crematogaster Sp.5				X	
Crematogaster Sp.6				X	
Cataulacus sp.				X	
Strumigenys sp.					X
Leptanillinae					
Protanilla sp.				X	
Pseudomyrmecinae					
Tetraponera rufonigra	X		X	X	X
Tetraponera spp.		X			
Tetraponera allaborans				X	
Ponerinae					
Odontomachhus simillimus	X	X			
Diacomma ceylonense	X	X			
Diacomma rugosum	X	X			X
Diacamma spp.	X		X	X	X
Odontomachus spp.	X		X	X	X
Hypoponera sp.	X	X	X	X	X
Leptogenys spp.	X	X			
Pachycondyla sp.	X	X		X	X
Platythyrea sp.		X			
Anochetus sp.				X	X
Total Species	**33**	**26**	**20**	**35**	**24**

Issues pertaining to taxonomy and research on ants

Like most other tropical countries, Sri Lanka has a rich ant fauna that remains undiscovered due to lack of taxonomic research by local scientists. Setting up a good reference collection of ants collected island wide is an essential task, since the collection at the National Museum is very old, incomplete and not properly curated.

Although a colony of ants consist of queen/s, males, major workers and minor workers, taxonomic keys of ants, generally, are based on the morphology of minor workers. However, identification to the species level requires the collection of both minor and major workers for some ant genera such as *Pheidole.* Ant genera of subfamily Leptanillinae have been identified on the basis of male morphology (Ogata et al., 1995) and it appears that workers are rare in this subfamily (Three workers of *Protanilla* were present in our recent collection).

The two publications, Bolton (1994) and Bolton (1995) provide the most recent classification and taxonomic keys for the subfamilies and genera of ants recorded from the world. About 9200 species of ants have been recorded from the world according to Bolton (1995) but this number has been increased to 11,100 by 2002. However, lack of a good reference collection of ants and unavailability of publications that provide species descriptions are two major problems for the identification of ants collected from Sri Lanka.

In the past, very few research has been carried out to collect, identify and record ants of Sri Lanka. Bingham (1903) is the only publication which carries species descriptions of ants based on sporadic collections. The system of classification used in this publication is outdated. Dias and Chaminda (2000, 2001) and Dias (2002, 2003) provide accounts on ants of Sri Lanka and a reference collection of ants is held in the Department of Zoology, University of Kelaniya.

The inadequacy of research that focuses on forest ants of Sri Lanka (except for Perera 2003, Perera and Dias, 2003) with only a few sporadic publications by foreign researchers is a major barrier for the development of myrmecology in Sri Lanka. The current research (funded by the National Science Foundation of Sri Lanka) in progress at the Department of Zoology, University of Kelaniya to study ant communities in the city reservoir associated forests in Ratnapura, Gilimale and Sinharaja would reveal most of the wet zone ants. In addition, steps should be taken to extend ant surveys to other districts in the Wet zone and also to the Dry zone of Sri Lanka.

Research priorities and recommendations

- Initiate taxonomic research on ants in the other districts of Sri Lanka, with emphasis on forest-dwelling ants.
- Initiate detailed studies on the single living representative species of the subfamily Aneuretinae (A. simoni) in the Ratnapura District. One of its current localities includes the highly disturbed "Pompekelle" forest, it would be worthwhile to document how it survives in such disturbed areas.
- Develop a well-maintained reference collection of ants at the Dept. of National Museums, Colombo.
- Maintain active links with the Network for the study of Asian ants (ANeT), an association comprising Asian myrmecologists who work towards the development of myrmecology in Asia (Website:http://www.geocities.com/anet_malaysia). New research findings of the members of this association are published through ANeT Newsletter printed at the Kagoshima University in Japan.

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Appendix 1: A provisional checklist of subfamilies, genera and species of ants recorded from Sri Lanka (10 subfamilies, 61 genera and 180 species)

AENICTINAE

***Aenictus* Shuckard**
Aenictus fergusoni Walker
Aenictus porizonoides Walker
Aenictus biroi Forel
Aenictus pachycercus (Dalla Torre)
Aenictus ceylonicus (Dalla Torre)

ANEURETINAE

Aneuretus Emery
Aneuretus simoni Emery (Endemic)

CERAPACHYINAE

***Cerapachys* Smith**
Cerapachys coecus (Emery)
Cerapachys fossulatus Forel
Cerapachys fragosus (Emery)
Cerapachys luteoviger Brown
Cerapachys typhlus (Emery)

DOLICHODERINAE

***Dolichoderus* Lund**
Dolichoderus taprobanae (Mayr)
***Ochetellus* Shattuck**
Ochetellus glaber Shattuck
***Tapinoma* Foerster**
Tapinoma melanocephallum (Santschi)
Tapinoma indicum Forel
***Technomyrmex* Mayr**
Technomyrmex albipes Emery
Technomyrmex bicolor Emery
Technomyrmex detorquens (Donisthorpe)
Technomyrmex elatior Bingham
Technomyrmex albipes (Emery)

DORYLINAE

Dorylus Fabricius
Dorylus orientalis Fabricius

FORMICINAE

***Acropyga* Roger**
Acropyga acutiventris Roger

***Anoplolepis* Santschi**
Anoplolepis gracilipes (Jerdon)
***Camponotus* Mayr**
Camponotus irritans (Roger)
Camponotus albipes Emery
Camponotus auriculatus Mayr
Camponotus mitis (Roger)
Camponotus barbatus Roger
Camponotus fletcheri Donisthorpe
Camponotus greeni Forel
Camponotus sericeus Mayr
Camponotus indeflexus (Donisthorpe)
Camponotus variegatus Mayr
Camponotus mendax Bingham
Camponotus maculatus (Mayr)
Camponotus isabellae Forel
Camponotus latebrosus (Donisthorpe)
Camponotus ominosus Forel
Camponotus rufoglaucus Forel
Camponotus reticulatus Roger
Camponotus sesquipedalis Roger
Camponotus simoni Emery
Camponotus thraso Bingham
Camponotus varians Roger
Camponotus wedda Forel
***Lepisiota* Santschi**
Lepisiota capensis Mayr
***Myrmoteras* Forel**
M. binghami Forel
Myrmoteras ceylonica Gregg

***Oecophylla* Smith**
Oecophylla smaragdina Fabricius
***Paratrechina* Motschoulsky**
Paratrechina longicornis Latrielle
Paratrechina taylori (Bolton)
Paratrechina yerburyi (Bolton)
***Plagiolepis* Mayr**
Plagiolepis pisssina Roger
Polyrhachis Smith
Polyrhachis rastellata Smith F.
Polyrhachis (Hemioptica) bugnioni Forel
Polyrhachis (Hemioptica) scissa (Roger, 1862)
Polyrhachis (campomyrma) exercita

Donisthorpe
Polyrhachis (Myrma) horni Emery
Polyrhachis (Myrma) illaudata Donisthorpe
Polyrhachis (Myrmhopla) jerdonii Emery
Polyrhachis (Myrma) nigra Emery
Polyrhachis (Myrmhopla) tibialis var. *pectita* Santschi
Polyrhachis (Myrma) punctillata Emery
Polyrhachis (Myrmhopla) rupicapra Emery
Polyrhachis (Myrmhopla) sophocles Emery
Polyrhachis (Myrmothrinax) thrinax Forel
Polyrhachis (Myrmhopla) xanthippe Emery
Polyrhachis (Myrma) yerburyi Emery
***Prenolepis* Mayr**
***Pseudolasius* Emery**
Pseudolasius isabellae Forel
***Acanthomyrmex* Emery**
Acanthomyrmex luciolae Emery

MYRMICINAE

***Anillomyrma* Emery**
Anillomyrma decamera Ettershank
***Aphaenogaster* Mayr**
Aphaenogaster becarii Emery
***Calyptomyrmex* Baroni Urbani**
Calyptomyrmex singalensis Baroni Urbani
Calyptomyrmex tamil Baroni Urbani
Calyptomyrmex vedda Baroni Urbani
***Cardiocondyla* Emery**
Cardiocondyla nuda Forel
***Cataulacus* Emery**
Cataulacus simoni Emery
Cataulacus taprobanae Smith F.
***Crematogaster* Lund**
Crematogaster dohrni Mayr
Crematogaster anthracina Smith
Crematogaster apicalis (Emery)
Crematogaster biroi (Emery)
Crematogaster brunnescens (Emery)
Crematogaster haputalensis (Emery)
Crematogaster pellens (Donisthorpe)
Crematogaster ransonneti Emery
Crematogaster rogeri Emery
Crematogaster rogenhoferi Mayr
***Dilobocondyla* Santschi**
Dilobocondyla didita (Donisthorpe)
***Lophomyrmex* Emery**
Lophomyrmex quadrispinosus (Jerdon)

***Metapone* Forel**
Metapone greeni Forel
Metapone johni Karavaiev

***Meranoplus* Smith F.**
Meranoplus bicolor (Smith F.)
***Monomorium* Mayr**
Monomorium destructor (Jerdon)
Monomorium floricola (Jerdon)
Monomorium pharaonis (L.)
Monomorium latinode Mayr
Monomorium consternens (Donisthorpe)
Monomorium subopacum (Mayr)
Monomorium rogeri (Ettershank)
Monomorium criniceps (Emery)
Monomorium taprobanae (Bolton)
***Monomorium mayri* Forel**

***Myrmicaria* Saunders**
Myrmicaria brunnea Saunders

***Oligomyrmex* Ettershank**
Oligomyrmex bruni Forel
Oligomyrmex butteli (Ettershank)
Oligomyrmex deponens (Donisthorpe)
Oligomyrmex aprobanae Forel

***Paedalgus* Forel**
Paedalgus escherichi Forel.
***Paratopula* Wheeler**
Paratopula ceylonica (Wheeler)
***Pheidole* Westwood**
Pheidole barreleti Forel
Pheidole ceylonica Motchoulsky
Pheidole diffidens Walker
Pheidole gracilipes (Emery)
Pheidole horni Emery
Pheidole latinoda (Roger)
Pheidole malinsii Forel
Pheidole megacephala (Roger)
Pheidole nietneri Emery
Pheidole noda Smith
Pheidole parva Mayr

Pheidole pronotalis Forel
Pheidole rugosa Smith F.
Pheidole spathifera Emery
Pheidole sulcaticeps Roger
Pheidole templaria Forel

***Pheidologeton* Mayr**
Pheidologeton diversus (Jerdon)
Pheidologeton pygmaeus Emery
Pheidologeton ceylonensis Forel
***Rophalomastix* Forel**
Rophalomastix escherichi Forel
***Recurvidris* (Bolton)**
Recurvidris pickburni (Bolton)
***Solenopsis* Westwood**
Solenopsis geminata Mayr
Solenopsis nitens Bingham
***Stereomyrmex* Emery**
Stereomyrmex horni Emery (Endemic)
***Strumigenys* F. Smith**
Strumigenys godeffroyi Brown
Strumigenys lyroessa (Roger)
***Tetramorium* Mayr**
Tetramorium bicarinatum (Mayr)
Tetramorium curvispinosum Mayr
Tetramorium tortuosum Roger
Tetramorium simillimum (Mayr)
Tetramorium pilosum Emery
Tetramorium pacificum Mayr
Tetramorium transversarium Roger
Tetramorium yerburyi Bingham
Vollenhovia Mayr
Vollenhovia escherichi Forel

PONERINAE

***Anochetus* Mayr**
Anochetus consultans (Brown)
Anochetus longifossatus Mayr
Anochetus madaraszi Mayr
Anochetus nietneri (Mayr)
Anochetus yerburyi Forel

***Centromyrmex* Mayr**
Centromyrmex feae (Emery)
***Cryptopone* Emery**
Cryptopone testacea Emery

***Diacamma* Mayr**
Diacamma rugosum Mayr
Diacamma ceylonense Emery
D. didita (Donisthorpe)
***Gnamptogenys* Brown**
Gnamptogenys coxalis (Brown)
***Harpegnathos* Jerdon**
Harpegnathos saltator Jerdon
***Hypoponera* Santschi**
Hypoponera ceylonensis (Taylor)
Hypoponera confinis Wilson & Taylor
Hypoponera taprobanae Bolton
***Leptogenys* Roger**
Leptogenys ocellifera Emery
Leptogenys exudans (Donisthorpe)
Leptogenys falcigera Roger
Leptogenys hysterica Forel
Leptogenys. meritans (Donisthorpe)
Leptogenys. pruinosa Forel
Leptogenys. diminuta (Emery)
Leptogenys. yerburyi Forel
Leptogenys peuqueti (Andre)
***Myopopone* Roger**
Myopopone castanea (Roger)
***Myopias* Roger**
Myopias amblyops Roger
***Odontomachus* Latreille**
Odontomachus simillimus Fred Smith
***Pachycondyla* Smith F.**
Pachycondyla luteipes Brown
***Platythyrea* Roger**
Platythyrea parallela (Donisthorpe)
Platythyrea clypeata Forel

PSEUDOMYRMECINAE

***Tetraponera* Smith F.**
Tetraponera rufonigra (Smith F.)
Tetraponera allaborans
Tetraponera nigra var. *insularis* (Bolton)
T. petiolata (Bingham)

LEPTANILLINAE

Leptanilla Emery
Leptanilla besucheti Baroni Urbani
Protanilla Taylor