

***Monomorium fieldi* Forel (Hymenoptera: Formicidae) is the current name to use for ants previously known as *Monomorium antipodum* Forel and *Monomorium orientale* Mayr in New Zealand**

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There is no doubt that many entomologists have encountered difficulties trying to separate the tiny ants *Monomorium antipodum* Forel 1901 from *M. orientale* Mayr, 1879. It is now apparent that in New Zealand specimens previously identified under these names are all *M. fieldi* Forel 1910.

Don (2001) discusses the closer relationship of *M. antipodum* with Australian *Monomorium* species than to those in New Zealand. Brown (1958) discusses a very unsatisfactory and tentative distinction between *M. antipodum* and *M. orientale*. More recently, Don (2004) has confirmed that all New Zealand *M. orientale* specimens were misidentifications of *M. antipodum*.

Ants collected in Onehunga, Auckland in March 1998 from the dead stem of an *Impatiens* sp. (Balsamineaceae) have allowed the situation to be clarified. At the time these ants were tentatively identified by A.W. Don as *Monomorium orientale*. However, his recent comparison with *M. orientale* specimens from India have revealed inconsistencies with the Onehunga specimens. Electronic images of these specimens were sent for examination to Brian Heterick, an Australian specialist on the genus *Monomorium*, and he provisionally determined the ants as *M. fieldi* (Don 2004).

In April 2004, John Early from the Auckland Museum submitted specimens tentatively identified as *M. fieldi*, and suspected to be a new record for New Zealand, to the MAF National Plant Pest Reference Laboratory (NPPRL). Specimens were sent from NPPRL to CSIRO ant taxonomist Steve Shattuck for validation. Both Steve Shattuck and Brian Heterick have confirmed the identification as *Monomorium fieldi* (S. Shattuck, November 2004, *personal communication*).

Along with the *M. fieldi* specimens, the NPPRL collection (PANZ) holdings of *M. antipodum* specimens collected in New Zealand (including those labelled as *M. orientale*) were sent to Steve Shattuck for comparison and he found that all of these specimens belong to the same species, the Australian *M. fieldi* (S. Shattuck, November 2004, *personal communication*).

Monomorium antipodum Forel was first described in 1901 from Auckland (Hymenoptera Name server 2001), and with confirmation of the identity of *M. fieldi*, it is possible that *M. fieldi* may be the junior synonym of *M. antipodum* (S. Shattuck, November 2004, *personal communication*). Clearly, the taxonomy of the New Zealand *Monomorium* needs to be revisited to clarify the validity of the species name *antipodum*.

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References

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