

The Taxonomy and Conservation Status of Ants (Order: Hymenoptera, Family: Formicidae) in Sri Lanka

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Introduction

Ants are a common group of insects in most terrestrial habitats in Sri Lanka. Their habitats vary from highly disturbed urbanized areas to undisturbed forests. Further, the ants occupy a wide variety of microhabitats ranging from soil (up to a depth of about 20 cm) decaying wood, plants, trees, litter, termite nests *etc.* Bingham (1903) was the first to attempt documenting of the ant species in Sri Lanka. For the next 50 years, ants of Sri Lanka have received little attention. During the past five decades several taxonomic works on ants of Sri Lanka have been published (Bolton & Belshaw, 1987; Dorow & Kohout, 1995; Jayasooriya & 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 & Chaminda, 2000; Dias, *et al.*, 2001) and this work was later extended to other Districts such as Colombo, Ratnapura and Galle (Dias & Chaminda, 2001; Chaminda & Dias, 2001). Books and articles that are relevant to systematics of ants published up to 2003 has been summarised by Dias (2005, 2006). Classification of ants has been revised by Bolton (2003) and the recent revisions are presented in Bolton, *et al.*, (2006, 2012). In addition, several websites are available on world ants (www.antbase.org) and the ants of several countries (Japanese ants colour image database, Ants of India, Ants of Papua New Guinea *etc.*). The website on ants of Sri Lanka has been launched in 2011.

Current taxonomic status and taxonomic issues

According to the currently valid classification (Bolton, 2003; Bolton, *et al.*, 2006), ants belonging to twelve subfamilies, sixty three genera and, two hundred and fifteen species and morphospecies have been recorded from Sri Lanka (Table A).

The provisional checklist of ants is based on Bolton (1995), specimens deposited at National Museum, Colombo, the collections of the first author from the wet and dry zones during 2000 - 2011 and the collection from dry, intermediate and arid zone districts, namely, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Kurunegala and Puttalam, by the other two authors for their postgraduate studies. *Solenopsis geminata*, *Oecophylla smaragdina*, *Meranoplus bicolor*, *Paratrechina longicornis* and *Tapinoma melanocephalum* have been listed from Vantharumoolai region in Batticaloa District (Vinobaba L., personal communication). Based on the IUCN criteria, nineteen 'Endangered' and thirty three 'Critically Endangered' species have been identified. The Sri Lankan Relict Ant, *Aneuretus simoni* Emery is currently included in the 'Endangered' category.

Table A. Number of genera and species in each of the twelve ant subfamilies recorded from Sri Lanka.

Subfamily	Genera	Species	Morpho-species
Aenictinae	1	5	
Amblyoponinae	2	1	3
Aneuretinae	1	1	
Cerapachyinae	1	6	1
Dolichoderinae	5	8	4
Dorylinae	1	3	
Ectatomminae	1	1	
Formicinae	12	54	3
Leptanillinae	2	01	3
Myrmicinae	23	79	1
Ponerinae	11	31	6
Pseudomyrmecinae	1	4	
	61	194	21

In addition to the generic and species level classification, a number of ant genera have been classified to subgenera, subspecies and varieties (Bolton et al. 2006) but the generic name and species name of any ant is presented in Appendix Table 1. Also, *Carebara* is the currently valid generic name of *Oligomyrmex* (Fernandez, 2004; Bolton et al. 2006). Among the ant genera listed in Appendix Table 1 the following ant genera, *Acanthomyrmex*, *Anillomyrma*, *Gnamptogenys*, *Metapone*, *Paratopula*, *Rophalomastix*, *Myopias* and *Myopopone* were never observed during 2000 to 2011 period. Therefore, they are included in the 'Data Deficient (DD)' category. Inadequate research on ant systematics, lack of funding for accessing foreign ant repositories and lack of morphological descriptions for identification to the species levels are the major taxonomic issues in ant systematics. Also, identification to the species level requires the collection of major and minor workers (at the same time) of certain ant genera such as *Pheidole* but the sampling methods did not fulfil this need. Sampling methods that were suitable for ground ants and ground-foraging ants were employed for our research and therefore, ant species that occupy other microhabitats (e.g. arboreal – *Polyrhachis* spp., *Tetraponera* spp.) and forage elsewhere had a very low representation in this collection.

Distribution

In order to determine the distribution pattern of ants in Sri Lanka an extensive survey was conducted in Gampaha, Colombo, Galle and Kalutara Districts and intensive surveys conducted in other Districts from 2000-2011. Two new records, the presence of *Aneuretus simoni* Emery (Sri Lankan Relict Ant) in "Kirikanda" forest (Dias, et al., 2011 in press) and "Kalugala Kanda" forest in Kalutara District (by the first author), were reported in 2010 and 2011 respectively. Members of Ectatomminae were never observed in our collection.

Threats

Due to the lack of adequate research on individual ant species very little is evident as threats to the ant fauna. Lack of ground vegetation and leaf litter seems to be the reason for the absence of leaf litter ants, mostly common ponerines, in cultivated lands when compared with the ant

fauna in the nearby forests. Further, setting fire to land before cultivating or to promote grass growth in pasture lands, which is a common practice in most parts of Sri Lanka has been identified as a major threat to many species of ground dwelling ant fauna.

Conservation

Awareness programmes on the ecological and economic (where applicable) importance, general biology and distribution of ants should be conducted at schools, universities and through media. Ants that are considered as agricultural pests (e.g. *Solenopsis geminata*, *Meranoplus bicolor*, *Acropyga acutiventris*), nuisance insects or household pests (tramp species) and the medically important species (Dias, 2011) should be recognized and excluded from the list. Habitats that are critically important for endemic and threatened ant species (e.g. *Aneuretus simoni*, *Stereomyrmex horni*) that do not come within the protected area network must be identified and actions should be taken to ensure that these habitats are maintained to ensure the survival of these species.

Research gaps and research needs

The inadequacy of research that focuses on forest ants of Sri Lanka (except for Perera 2003, Dias and Perera, 2011, Gunawardene et al., 2008, Kosgamage, 2011, Peiris, 2012) with only a few sporadic publications by foreign researchers is a major barrier for the development of myrmecology in Sri Lanka. Available information on ants in Sri Lanka is restricted to few Districts of Sri Lanka. Therefore, the survey on ants should be extended to natural and man made habitats in all other Districts of Sri Lanka that are under different levels of disturbance. Research projects on ant systematics, biology and ecology of individual species and distribution of endemic species should be encouraged among undergraduate and postgraduate students. One of the main reasons for lack of research on ants of Sri Lanka can be attributed to lack of trained personnel in this field of specialization. Therefore, the curricula in the Universities should be revised in order to enhance the theoretical knowledge and practical skills required in ant systematics. Further, short training workshops should be conducted to field biologists who are currently engaged in entomology research to encourage more research on ant fauna

Conclusions and recommendations

Current Red Listing of ant species has been based on the existing information (1960 - 2011) and a detailed check list including the conservation status of species that were evaluated is given in Appendix 1. *Aneuretus simoni*, *Cardiocondyla nuda*, *Centromyrmex feae*, *Cerapachys aitkini*, *Cerapachys fossulatus*, *Cerapachys fragosus*, *Cerapachys typhlus*, *Ochetellus glaber*, *Polyrhachis illaudatus*, *Polyrhachis rastellata*, *Pseudolasius isabellae*, *Stereomyrmex horni*, *Technomyrmex brunneus*, *Technomyrmex elatior*, *Prenolepis naorojii*, *Myrmecina striata* and *Dorylus labiatus* could especially be considered as Critically Endangered among them. Lack of adequate surveys on ants in various microhabitats and taxonomic issues pertaining to ant identification are the major reasons identified for the current scarcity of information on ants of Sri Lanka. Therefore, the ant list given in this paper may not include all the species that are present in Sri Lanka today and therefore, needs to be improved in the future. In order to achieve this goal, more surveys on ants should be conducted with the participation of university students and other enthusiasts. Further, a book on the ants of Sri Lanka, giving morphological descriptions and colour photographs (where possible), should be published to encourage people to work on this lesser known yet common group of insects.

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Table 02: List of Ants in Sri Lanka

Scientific Name	Common Name	NCS	Criteria
Subfamily: Aenictinae			
<i>Aenictus biroi</i> Forel		DD	
<i>Aenictus ceylonicus</i> (Mayr)	E: Asian Reddish Brown Army Ant	DD	
<i>Aenictus fergusonii</i> (Karavaive)		EN	B2ab(iii)
<i>Aenictus pachycerus</i> (Dalla Torre)	E: Army Ant	EN	B1ab(iii)
<i>Aenictus porizonoides</i> Walker		DD	
Subfamily: Aneuretinae			
<i>Aneuretus simoni</i> Emery	E: Sri Lankan Relict Ant	EN	B1+2ab(iii)
Subfamily: Myrmicinae			
<i>Myrmecina striata</i> Emery		CR	B2ab(iii)
<i>Acanthomyrmex luciolae</i> Emery		DD	
<i>Anillomyrma decamera</i> Emery		DD	
<i>Calyptomyrmex tamil</i> Baroni Urbani		DD	
<i>Calyptomyrmex vedda</i> Baroni Urbani		DD	
<i>Calyptomyrmex singalensis</i> Baroni Urbani		DD	
<i>Cardiocondyla nuda</i> (Mayr)		CR	B2ab(iii)
<i>Cataulacus simoni</i> Emery		DD	
<i>Cataulacus taprobanae</i> Smith F.		DD	
<i>Crematogaster anthracina</i> Smith F.		DD	
<i>Crematogaster biroi</i> Mayr		EN	B2ab(iii)
<i>Crematogaster apicalis</i> Motchoulsky		DD	
<i>Crematogaster brunnescens</i> Motchoulsky		DD	
<i>Crematogaster dohrni</i> Mayr	S: Kodaya	VU	B1ab(iii)
<i>Crematogaster pellens</i> Walker		DD	
<i>Crematogaster politula</i> Forel		CR	B1+2ab(iii)
<i>Crematogaster ransonneti</i> Mayr		DD	
<i>Crematogaster rogenhoferi</i> Mayr	E: Thai Tree Ant	CR	B2ab(iii)
<i>Crematogaster rogeri</i> Mayr		DD	
<i>Crematogaster rothneyi</i> Forel	S: Kodaya	LC	
<i>Lophomyrmex quadrispinosus</i> (Jerdon)		LC	
<i>Meranoplus bicolor</i> (Guerin-Meneville)		LC	
<i>Metapone greeni</i> Forel		DD	
<i>Metapone johni</i> Karavaiev		DD	
<i>Monomorium floricola</i> (Jerdon)	E: Flower Ant S: Thel Koombiya	LC	
<i>Monomorium subopacum</i> (Smith F.)		DD	
<i>Monomorium taprobanae</i> Forel	E: Sri Lanka Flower Ant	DD	
<i>Monomorium latinode</i> Mayr		DD	
<i>Monomorium criniceps</i> (Mayr)		EN	B1+2ab(iii)
<i>Monomorium destructor</i> (Jerdon)	E: Singapore Ant S: Rathu Koombiya	LC	
<i>Monomorium mayri</i> Forel		DD	
<i>Monomorium pharaonis</i> (L.)	E: Pharaoh Ant	LC	
<i>Monomorium rogeri</i> (Mayr)		DD	

Scientific Name	Common Name	NCS	Criteria
<i>Myrmecaria brunnea</i> Saunders		LC	
<i>Carebara bruni</i> (Forel)		DD	
<i>Carebara butteli</i> (Forel)		DD	
<i>Carebara deponens</i> (Walker)		DD	
<i>Carebara taprobanae</i> (Forel)		DD	
<i>Carebara escherichi</i> (Forel)		DD	
<i>Paratopula ceylonica</i> (Emery)		DD	
<i>Pheidole latinoda</i> Roger		DD	
<i>Pheidole nietneri</i> Emery		DD	
<i>Pheidole sulcaticeps</i> Roger		DD	
<i>Pheidole barreleti</i> Forel		DD	
<i>Pheidole ceylonica</i> (Motchoulsky)		DD	
<i>Pheidole diffidens</i> (Walker)		DD	
<i>Pheidole gracilipes</i> (Motschoulsky)		DD	
<i>Pheidole horni</i> Emery		DD	
<i>Pheidole malinsii</i> Forel		DD	
<i>Pheidole megacephala</i> Forel	E: Big Head Ant	DD	
<i>Pheidole noda</i> Forel		DD	
<i>Pheidole parva</i> Mayr		DD	
<i>Pheidole pronotalis</i> Forel		DD	
<i>Pheidole rhombinoda</i> Mayr		CR	B2ab(iii)
<i>Pheidole rugosa</i> Smith F.		DD	
<i>Pheidole spathifera</i> Forel		DD	
<i>Pheidole templaria</i> Forel		DD	
<i>Pheidologeton ceylonensis</i> Forel		DD	
<i>Pheidologeton diversus</i> (Smith F.)	E: East Indian Harvesting Ant	VU	B1ab(iii)
<i>Pheidologeton pygmaeus</i> Forel		DD	
<i>Recurvidris pickburni</i> Bolton		DD	
<i>Recurvidris recurvispinosa</i> (Forel)		VU	B1ab(iii)
<i>Rophalomastix escherichi</i> Forel		DD	
<i>Solenopsis geminata</i> (Fabricius)	E: Red Tropical Fire Ant S: Nayi Koombiya	LC	
<i>Solenopsis nitens</i> Bingham	E: Fire Ant	DD	
<i>Stereomyrmex horni</i> Emery		CR	B2ab(iii)
<i>Strumigenys godeffroyi</i> Mayr		DD	
<i>Strumigenys lyroessa</i> (Roger)		EN	B1+2ab(iii)
<i>Tetramorium bicarinatum</i> (Nylander)		LC	
<i>Tetramorium pacificum</i> Mayr		DD	
<i>Tetramorium simillimum</i> (Smith)		DD	
<i>Tetramorium curvispinosum</i> Mayr		DD	
<i>Tetramorium pilosum</i> Emery		DD	
<i>Tetramorium smithi</i> Mayr		VU	B1ab(iii)
<i>Tetramorium tortuosum</i> Roger		VU	B1ab(iii)
<i>Tetramorium transversarium</i> Roger		DD	
<i>Tetramorium walshi</i> (Forel)		VU	B1ab(iii)

Scientific Name	Common Name	NCS	Criteria
<i>Tetramorium yerburyi</i> Forel		DD	
<i>Vollenhovia escherichi</i> Forel		DD	
Subfamily: Cerapachyinae			
<i>Cerapachys fossulatus</i> Forel		CR	B2ab(iii)
<i>Cerapachys luteoviger</i> Brown		DD	
<i>Cerapachys coecus</i> (Mayr)		DD	
<i>Cerapachys fragosus</i> (Roger)		CR	B2ab(iii)
<i>Cerapachys typhlus</i> (Roger)		CR	B2ab(iii)
<i>Cerapachys aitkenii</i> Forel		CR	B1+2ab(iii)
Subfamily: Dolichoderinae			
<i>Dolichoderus taprobanae</i> (Smith F.)		CR	B2ab(iii)
<i>Ochetellus glaber</i> (Mayr)	E: Black House Ant	CR	B2ab(iii)
<i>Tapinoma indicum</i> Forel		LC	
<i>Tapinoma melanocephalum</i> (Fabricius)	E: Ghost Ant S: Hini Koombiya	LC	
<i>Technomyrmex bicolor</i> Forel		VU	B1ab(iii)
<i>Technomyrmex albipes</i> (Smith F.)	S: Kalu Koombiya	LC	
<i>Technomyrmex detorqueus</i> (Walker)		DD	
<i>Technomyrmex elatior</i> Forel		CR	B1+2ab(iii)
Subfamily: Dorylinae			
<i>Dorylus labiatus</i> Shuckard		CR	B2ab(iii)
<i>Dorylus laevigatus</i> (Smith F.)	E: Driver Ant	EN	B1+2ab(iii)
<i>Dorylus orientalis</i> Westwood	E: Red Ant	EN	B1+2ab(iii)
Subfamily: Ectatomminae			
<i>Gnamptogenys coxalis</i> Brown		DD	
Subfamily: Ponerinae			
<i>Anochetus consultans</i> (Walker)		DD	
<i>Anochetus graeffei</i> Mayr		VU	B1ab(iii)
<i>Anochetus longifossatus</i> Mayr		EN	B1ab(iii)
<i>Anochetus madaraszi</i> Mayr		DD	
<i>Anochetus nietneri</i> (Roger)		CR	B2ab(iii)
<i>Anochetus yerburyi</i> Forel		DD	
<i>Centromyrmex feae</i> (Emery)		EN	B1+2ab(iii)
<i>Cryptopone testacea</i> Emery		DD	
<i>Diacamma ceylonense</i> Emery	S: Kadiya	EN	B1+2ab(iii)
<i>Diacamma rugosum</i> Forel	E: Queenless Ponerine Ant S: Kadiya	EN	B1+2ab(iii)
<i>Harpegnathos saltator</i> Jerdon	E: Jerdon's Jumping Ant	EN	B1+2ab(iii)
<i>Hypoponera ceylonensis</i> (Mayr)		DD	
<i>Hypoponera confinis</i> (Roger)		CR	B2ab(iii)
<i>Hypoponera taprobanae</i> (Forel)		DD	
<i>Leptogenys exudans</i> (Walker)		DD	
<i>Leptogenys hysterica</i> Forel		DD	
<i>Leptogenys processionalis</i> (Jerdon)		LC	
<i>Leptogenys pruinosa</i> Forel		EN	B2ab(iii)
<i>Leptogenys yerburyi</i> Forel		DD	

Scientific Name	Common Name	NCS	Criteria
<i>Leptogenys diminuta</i> (Smith F.)		DD	
<i>Leptogenys falcigera</i> Roger		DD	
<i>Leptogenys meritans</i> (Walker)		DD	
<i>Leptogenys peuqueti</i> (Andre)		CR	B2ab(iii)
<i>Myopias amblyops</i> Roger		DD	
<i>Odontomachus simillimus</i> Smith F.	E: Indian Trap-jaw Ant S: Dala Kadiya	LC	
<i>Pachycondyla luteipes</i> (Mayr)		LC	
<i>Pachycondyla rubiginosa</i> (Emery)		CR	B2ab(iii)
<i>Pachycondyla sulcata</i> (Forel)		CR	B2ab(iii)
<i>Pachycondyla tesseronoda</i> (Emery)		LC	
<i>Platythyrea clypeata</i> Forel		DD	
<i>Platythyrea parallela</i> (Smith F.)		VU	B1ab(iii)
Subfamily: Amblyoponinae			
<i>Myopopone maculata</i>		DD	
Subfamily: Leptanillinae			
<i>Leptanilla besucheti</i> Baroni Urbani		DD	
Subfamily: Pseudomyrmecinae			
<i>Tetraponera allaborans</i> (Walker, 1859)		VU	B2ab(iii)
<i>Tetraponera nigra</i> (Jerdon)		DD	
<i>Tetraponera petiolata</i> (Smith F.)		DD	
<i>Tetraponera rufonigra</i> (Jerdon)	E: Arboreal Bicolored Ant S: Hathpolaya	LC	
Subfamily: Formicinae			
<i>Acropyga acutiventris</i> Roger		LC	
<i>Anoplolepis gracilipes</i> (Smith F.)	E: Yellow Crazy Ant S: Ambalaya	LC	
<i>Camponotus compressus</i> Fabricius		LC	
<i>Camponotus irritans</i> (Smith F.)		LC	
<i>Camponotus latebrosus</i> Donisthorpe		DD	
<i>Camponotus mitis</i> (Smith F.)		DD	
<i>Camponotus ominusus</i> Forel		DD	
<i>Camponotus simoni</i> Emery		DD	
<i>Camponotus thraso</i> Forel		DD	
<i>Camponotus wedda</i> Forel		DD	
<i>Camponotus albipes</i> Emery		DD	
<i>Camponotus auriculatus</i> Mayr		DD	
<i>Camponotus barbatus</i> Roger		DD	
<i>Camponotus fletcheri</i> Donisthorpe		DD	
<i>Camponotus greeni</i> Forel		DD	
<i>Camponotus indeflexus</i> (Walker)		DD	
<i>Camponotus isabellae</i> Forel		DD	
<i>Camponotus mendax</i> Forel		DD	
<i>Camponotus oblongus</i> Forel		EN	B1+2ab(iii)
<i>Camponotus reticulatus</i> Roger		LC	
<i>Camponotus rufoglaucus</i> (Jerdon)		VU	B1ab(iii)

Scientific Name	Common Name	NCS	Criteria
<i>Camponotus sericeus</i> (Fabricius)	E: Golden Backed Carpenter Ant	LC	
<i>Camponotus sesquipedalis</i> Roger		DD	
<i>Camponotus varians</i> Roger		DD	
<i>Camponotus variegatus</i> (Smith F.)		CR	B2ab(iii)
<i>Lepisiota capensis</i> (Mayr)	E: Black Sugar Ant	CR	B2ab(iii)
<i>Lepisiota frauenfeldi</i> (Mayr)		VU	B1ab(iii)
<i>Lepisiota opaca</i> (Mayr)		VU	B1ab(iii)
<i>Myrmoteras ceylonica</i> Gregg		DD	
<i>Oecophylla smaragdina</i> (Fabricius)	E: Weaver ant S: Dimiya	LC	
<i>Paratrechina longicornis</i> (Latreille)	E: Longhorn Crazy Ant S: Kalu Koombiya	LC	
<i>Paratrechina indica</i> Forel		EN	B1+2ab(iii)
<i>Paratrechina taylori</i> (Forel)		DD	
<i>Nylanderia yerburyi</i> (Forel)		LC	
<i>Plagiolepis jerdonii</i> Forel		VU	B1ab(iii)
<i>Plagiolepis pissina</i> Roger		DD	
<i>Polyrhachis bugnioni</i> Forel		DD	
<i>Polyrhachis exercita</i> (Walker)		DD	
<i>Polyrhachis horni</i> Emery		DD	
<i>Polyrhachis jerdonii</i> Forel		EN	B1+2ab(iii)
<i>Polyrhachis nigra</i> Mayr		DD	
<i>Polyrhachis rupicapra</i> Roger		DD	
<i>Polyrhachis thrinax</i> Roger		DD	
<i>Polyrhachis tibialis</i> Santschi		DD	
<i>Polyrhachis xanthippe</i> Forel		DD	
<i>Polyrhachis yerburyi</i> Forel		DD	
<i>Polyrhachis convexa</i> Roger		VU	B1ab(iii)
<i>Polyrhachis illaudata</i> Walker		CR	B1+2ab(iii)
<i>Polyrhachis punctillata</i> Roger		VU	B1ab(iii)
<i>Polyrhachis rastellata</i> (Latreille)		CR	B2ab(iii)
<i>Polyrhachis scissa</i> (Roger)		EN	B2ab(iii)
<i>Polyrhachis sophocles</i> Forel		DD	
<i>Prenolepis naorojii</i> Forel		CR	B2ab(iii)
<i>Pseudolasius isabellae</i> Forel		CR	B1+2ab(iii)

No of species: 194 (Due to the recent revisions in the ant taxonomy and removal of morphospecies this number has gone down)

No of endemics: 33 (based on "so far recorded from Sri Lanka only")

Global list contains only *Aneuretus simoni* as CR (B1+2c)