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Review of the ant genus *Aenictus* (Hymenoptera: Formicidae) in Australia with notes on *A. ceylonicus* (Mayr)

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Abstract

The Australian members of the ant genus *Aenictus* are revised. Eight species were found to occur in Australia with three described as new (*acerbus* **sp. n.**, *aratus* Forel, *diclops* **sp. n.**, *hilli* Clark, *nesiotis* Wheeler and Chapman, *philiporum* Wilson, *prolixus* **sp. n.** and *turneri* Forel). *A. hilli* is known only from males and its relationship to the remaining worker-based species is uncertain. Of the seven worker-based species, five are restricted to Australia, one is shared with Papua New Guinea and one is shared with Papua New Guinea and the Philippines. *Aenictus aratus nesiotis* Wheeler and Chapman is removed from synonymy with *A. aratus* and raised to full species, *A. pachycerus impressus* Karavaiev is newly synonymised with *A. aratus* and *A. turneri* is removed from synonymy with *A. ceylonicus* (Mayr). Additionally, the following changes are proposed for non-Australian species: *A. aitkenii* Forel is removed from synonymy with *A. aratus*, *A. aratus asiatica* Forel is removed from synonymy with *A. aratus* and synonymised with *A. aitkenii*, *A. levior* Karavaiev is removed from synonymy with *A. aratus* and raised to full species, *A. orientalis* (Karavaiev) is removed from synonymy with *A. ceylonicus*, *A. papuanus* Donisthorpe is removed from synonymy with *A. ceylonicus* and, together with *A. similis* Donisthorpe, is newly synonymised with *A. orientalis*. A lectotype is designated for *A. impressus* and a neotype for *A. exiguus*.

Key words: Hymenoptera, Formicidae, Aenictinae, *Aenictus*, taxonomy, new species, synonymy, Australia

Introduction

Aenictus occurs throughout Africa and in tropical and subtropical areas from India east through southern China to Taiwan and south to Australia with outlier, temperate-climate species or populations in Japan, Afghanistan, Armenia and south-central Australia (Bolton *et al.*, 2006; Gotwald, 1995; Shattuck, 1999). While widespread, nowhere are they common. All known species are "army ants" and conduct raids using large numbers of workers, primarily attacking other ants, social wasps and termites. While there are reports of these ants preying on other insects and even collecting honeydew from homopterans (Santschi, 1933; Gotwald, 1995), these habits appear to be uncommon. Unfortunately none of the Australian species of *Aenictus* have been studied in detail and only a few overseas species have been examined (for example *A. gracilis* and *A. laeviceps* by Schneirla, 1971) and most of our understanding is based on casual and opportunistic observations.

Foraging raids undertaken by these ants occur both day and night, usually across the ground surface but occasionally also arboreally. During raids, numerous workers attack a single nest or small area, with several workers coordinating their efforts to carry large prey items back to the nest or bivouac. They also have a nomadic life style, alternating between a migratory phase in which nests are temporary bivouacs in sheltered places above the ground and a stationary phase where semi-permanent underground nests are formed. During the nomadic phase bivouacs move regularly, sometimes more than once a day when larvae require large

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