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A checklist of the ants of China

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Abstract

China is one of the largest countries in the world and offers an incredible diversity of ecosystems and species. However the distribution of many insect species in China is still poorly known. Here, through a bibliographical review, we synthesize a species list of native and exotic ants (Hymenoptera: Formicidae) for 23 provinces of the People's Republic of China and eight surrounding regions. To date, no fewer than 939 valid named species and subspecies within 103 genera are listed from China. However, comparisons with other regions suggest that this list is still incomplete at both provincial and national scales based on the diversity of surrounding regions and the number of undescribed species reported in the literature. Although the species list generated here is not and cannot be exhaustive, we hope that it will facilitate future discovery, revision and conservation of Chinese ants.

Key words: Formicidae, Asia, species checklist

Introduction

With an area greater than 9,500,000 km², China is one of the largest countries in the world and the second largest country in Asia. As a consequence of its size, topographic relief, and extensive latitudinal gradient, China possesses no fewer than seven different biomes (from tundra to tropical forest; e.g., Olson *et al.* 2001), more than almost any other country. In addition, China bridges two biogeographic regions, the Palearctic realm and the Oriental realm (Hoffmann 2001, Fellowes 2006). Therefore, the tremendous diversity of species found in China (e.g., >31,000 plant species, nearly twice the U.S. flora, Qian & Ricklefs 1999, Flora of China 2011) is unsurprising. Distribution data on the plants of China has recently been compiled (Li 2008, Xie *et al.* 2009, Fang *et al.* 2011), but information on the distribution of animals, in particular smaller animals such as insects, is still limited. Because many of the rarest animals on Earth are thought to occur only in China (e.g., 20% of Chinese mammals are endemic, Smith and Yan 2008) and a large proportion of introduced species (particularly to other temperate regions) originate from Asia in general (Weber 1997, Lambdon *et al.* 2008), it is important to establish a solid basis of knowledge on the distribution of the native fauna.