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Taxonomic revision of the Neotropical Myrmicinae ant genus *Blepharidatta* Wheeler

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Abstract

We revise the taxonomy of the exclusively Neotropical Myrmicinae ant genus *Blepharidatta* (Attini), redescribing the known species (*B. brasiliensis* and *B. conops*), and describing two new species, *B. delabiei* sp. n. (Brazil: Bahia) and *B. fernandezi* sp. n. (Colombia: Amazonas). We also describe worker sting apparatuses, larvae, males, and ergatoid gynes of all species, except for *B. fernandezi*, known only from few worker specimens; we provide a key for identifying workers, present distribution maps for all species and summarize the knowledge on the biology of *Blepharidatta* species.

Key words: Taxonomy, Attini, Myrmicinae, ants, *Blepharidatta*

Introduction

The ant genus *Blepharidatta* (Myrmicinae) was described by Wheeler (1915) (type species *B. brasiliensis*, by monotypy) based on workers collected by C. William Beebe in May 15, 1915, in a suburb of the city of Belém, Pará, Brazil, at the mouth of the Amazon river. All specimens Beebe collected came from four square feet of jungle mold at the foot of a single tree. Wheeler (1915) commented that these ants are “evidently” to be placed in the tribe Attini (at the time Attini included exclusively fungus-growing ants), but that they differ so much from other known attine genera in the structure of the head and especially in the 2-segmented club of the antennae, the 4-toothed mandibles, and the regularly arranged setiform hairs on the dorsal surface, that it seemed necessary to him to establish a distinct genus. The name *Blepharidatta* refers to the inferior border of the scrobe, which is a ridge as long as the frontal carina that runs just above the compound eyes, like an eyelid, and can be loosely translated from Greek as fungus-growing ants with eyelids.

Brown (1953) transferred *Blepharidatta* to Ochetomyrmecini, calling attention to its close relation to *Wasmannia*. Kempf (1967) described the second species of the genus, *B. conops*, based also only on workers collected by Karol Lenko in the Fazenda Retiro das Telhas, Três Lagoas county, Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil, at daytime “walking on the ground of a xerophilous forest of the savanna type called cerradão”. Brown (1973) listed *Blepharidatta* as a probable synonym of *Ochetomyrmex* Mayr in his inventory of ant genera and subgenera of the world, but Kempf (1975) accepted *Blepharidatta* as valid, provided the first male generic diagnosis and described males of an unnamed species from northeastern Minas Gerais (here described as *B. delabiei* sp. n.).

George C. Wheeler and Jeanette Wheeler published in 1991 the first description of *Blepharidatta* larvae, based on specimens of *B. brasiliensis*. In the same paper, the authors proposed the tribe Blepharidattini, with *Blepharidatta* as type-genus, including also *Wasmannia*. When commenting on the larvae of Blepharidattini, Wheeler and Wheeler (1991) characterized them as: “profile attoid; mandibles amblyoponoid, with two acute teeth, one apical and one subapical; body hairs sparse and moderately long; generally distributed; unbranched, smooth and slightly curved”. They presented, however, a diagnosis for *Wasmannia* that does not match the larval diagnosis of the tribe. For instance they characterize the larval mandibles of *Wasmania* as pristomyrmecoid, instead of amblyoponoid, and in Fig 3c of the same paper, they depict the left mandible of a *B. brasiliensis* larva with a single apical tooth instead the two acute teeth mentioned in the larvae description (see our reformed diagnosis for the larva of *Blepharidatta*).