Myrmicaria ants of Asia

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In Asia, the existence of this clumsy walking ant stretched from Pakistan in the west to the the Moluccas archipelago (Boltsam Island) in the east. The genus also exists in Afrotropical region except the Malagasy. When it was first established in 1842 by Saunders, the genus was based on a male specimen of Myrmicaria brunei from India. The genus was of course recognized as Myrmicaria then. Few years later, Smith (1857) created two new genera, Physata and Heptacodylus. Eventually Smith (1865) combined the three genera into one genus known until now as Myrmicaria. The genus Myrmicaria was earlier confused with Physata and Heptacodylus due to its different antennal segment number. The male of Myrmicaria possess 13 antennal segments while the females possess 7 antennal segments.

In 1925, Santschi revised the genus mainly for the African ones. He also presented identification key to Indo-Australian fauna in the same work. However, the revision was considered "out of date" by Bolton in 1995. The genus was left unrevised for over fifty years when we started to collect the ants in various places in Sabah. Working together with Prof. Yamane from Kagoshima University with his rich Myrmicaria collection, our collection grew and more specimens were gathered from friends and colleagues from around the world over four years.

We now have clearer pictures of the genus. As suggested by Emery (1922), further clear evidence that we have found support that Myrmicaria can be divided into two species groups. Arochnoides species group Myrmicaria are mainly slender bodied members of Myrmicaria that exclusively build their polynogynous (multi nest colony) on the underside of leaf surface on trees. To date, six species have been identified under this species group with one new to science. The species are M. arochnoides, M. arachnoides, M. birmans, M. lutea, M. maryati sp. nov. and M. melanogaster.

The second species group is the brunei species group. Members of this group are generally larger in size. They build huge nests and galleries under the ground. Sixteen species have been recognized so far with 9 species new to science. The species are M. ampla sp. nov., M. bicolor sp. nov., M. borneensis sp. nov., M. carinata, M. densistriata, M. flavo, M. pogonina, M. gibbaa, M. maliungiensis sp. nov., M. pseudeflava sp. nov., M. rugosa, M. subcarinata, M. vidua, M. BC05, M. BC06 and M. BC07.

Most of the new species are awaiting publication. It may take a few more years before a complete revision is published.

Meanwhile, Myrmicaria collection in Borneensis is now being fully organized and updated.