

DISCUSSION OF THE SPECIES

Labidus coecus (Latreille)

This is a native and widely distributed species, ranging from Oklahoma and Arkansas to Texas and Louisiana, and south to Argentina.

Taxonomic Characters

Subfamily and generic characters: Polymorphic. Antenna extremely short, 12-segmented. Frontal carinae placed extremely close to each other, not concealing antennal insertions. Clypeus remarkably short, almost lacking. Eye absent or extremely small, ocelluslike. Epinotum unarmed. Tarsal claw with a tooth between its base and apex. Abdominal pedicel composed of two segments, the petiole and postpetiole. Sting present, but not always exerted. *Specific characters:* Workers 2.9–9.7 mm. long. Scape short, scarcely attaining more than mid length of head. Petiole with an anteroventral protuberance or spine. Most of body smooth and shiny except posterior half or more of thorax. Body color castaneous to reddish brown.

Biology and Economic Importance

This legionary ant lives in more or less temporary nests in decayed logs and stumps, or in the ground beneath stones and other objects. The ant may also nest beneath basement floors, or in and around foundation walls. Colonies are exceedingly large, containing many thousands of individuals. Workers are light-avoiding and are not often seen. Natural foods are arthropods, small mammals, and birds, which the ants kill and eat as carrion or refuse. Nuts and foods of a high protein content form much of their diet. The ants may invade houses in search of the latter foods, or meat. They can kill chickens and small pets, and also bite and sting fiercely. The species has also been known to short-circuit telephone wires by removing the lead sheathing. However, the ants are predators of many injurious insects such as the

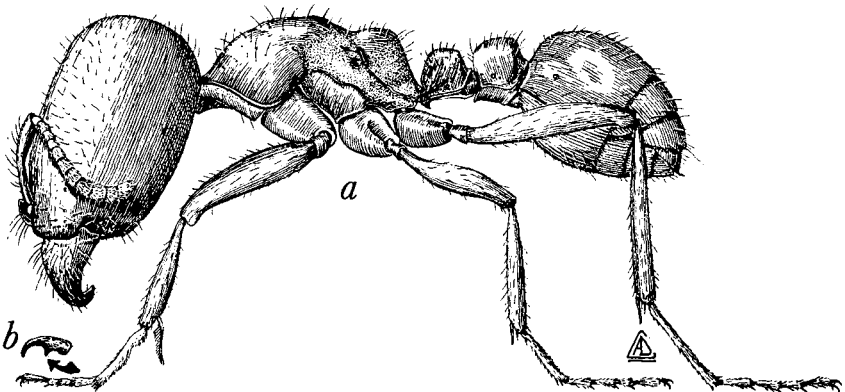


Figure 2.—*Labidus coecus* (Latreille): a, Lateral view of worker; b, lateral view of tarsal claw showing tooth.