

ments, the petiole and postpetiole. Sting present but not always exerted. *Specific characters:* Workers approximately 1.5 mm. long. Frontal carinae widely spaced, each forming a partial scrobe for reception of antennal scape. Antenna with a 3-segmented club; the last two segments of the club greatly enlarged and giving the false impression of a 2-segmented club. Apex of scape not attaining posterior border of head. Posterior border of head emarginate. Eye elongate, coarsely faceted, placed obliquely to longitudinal axis of head and forming a sharp angle, the apex of which is directed anteroventrally. Dorsal surface of head punctulate, the posterior region with weak, longitudinal rugulae. Sculpture of thorax highly variable, rugulose, or rugulose-reticulate, or both. Prothorax (viewed from above) with angular humeri. Promesonotal suture absent or obsolescent. Epinotal spines rather close together basally, each rather long and with acute apex. Petiolar node, in profile, subrectangular; from above, very distinctly longer than broad. Hairs of body sparse, long and slender, widely distributed. Body color ranging from light brown to golden brown, gaster often slightly darkened.

### **Biology and Economic Importance**

These ants nest in exposed soil and also in the soil beneath objects, in rotting wood, plant cavities, debris, under the bark or at the bases of leaf sheaths of plants and trees, and in houses. Nests in the soil are usually indefinite in form and may be compound; it is often difficult to delimit the area of a nest. Nesting habits vary greatly with respect to ecological habitats and climatic conditions. The ants appear adapted to nesting in very dry to very moist areas. During drouth periods the ants nest deeper in the soil, and during floods the nests may even be moved into trees. Colonies are usually populous and may contain more than one reproductive queen. Because the ants are sensitive to cold, it is believed they are not capable of living outdoors in the colder regions of the United States. Workers are noted for their love of honeydew, which they obtain by tending plant lice, mealybugs, scales, and white flies; workers have even been seen transporting immature stages of the cottony cushion scale, *Icerya purchasi* Maskell. Workers feed on dead insects, other arthropods, and small animals, and are probably predacious on many insects. The ants are especially noted for their painful and long-lasting stings, the effects of which may continue for several days. Allergic individuals may become pale and nervous or even shaky from several stings of these ants. Unlike *Solenopsis* spp., which sting on little or no provocation, the workers of *auropunctata* are not aggressive and sting only when pressed by clothing or other objects. However, so feared are they that it is difficult to get laborers to work in groves or fields where these ants are abundant. In houses, they may infest clothing, beds, or food. Workers feed on bacon, fatty beef, peanut butter, olive and cottonseed oils, milk, juice of ripe oranges, or the oil of ripe avocados. They seem to show a preference for fat meats and oil. Since no complete biological study of this species has been made, the ants may have other habits inimical to man of which we are not aware.

*References:* Wheeler, 1908a, pp. 143-144; Wheeler, 1919b, p. 304; Wolcott, 1936, pp. 549-550; Smith, 1936, p. 854; Spencer, 1941, pp. 4-14; Fernald, 1947, p. 428; Wolcott, 1948, pp. 826-828; Osburn, 1948, pp. 11-12; Smith, 1950, p. 275.