

THE SPECIES OF ANTS OF THE GENUS *LASIUS* IN BRITAIN

By C. A. COLLINGWOOD

(Shardlow Hall, Shardlow, Derbyshire)

Wilson (1955) has recently published a monographic revision of the ant genus *Lasius*. The following account discusses the British species in the light of various nomenclatorial changes made by Wilson with particular reference to the synonymizing of *L. mixtus* Nylander with *L. umbratus* Nylander on the one hand and the recognition of *L. rabaudi* Bondroit as a distinct species on the other. In addition a simplified key to all castes is given together with brief notes on the distribution of the species in Britain as at present known.

During his revision Wilson has examined large collections of material from all over Europe, Asia and America with special attention to local and geographic variation over the whole range of each species. As a result several changes in species diagnoses and nomenclature have been made. Many varietal and trivial names and some species have been shown to be worthless and have been relegated to synonymy, while the really important diagnostic characters for each species have been clearly brought out. This is a definitive study of a kind badly needed to clear up the ever increasing complexity of ant nomenclature in Europe in particular and may well set the pattern for future studies in ant taxonomy.

A picture of the whole range of each species is built up by the examination of two or three individuals from each of a randomly selected nest series. A feature of great interest is the apparent development, in some cases, of convergent characters in one of a pair of similar species over parts of its range, where the other is absent. This is illustrated for example by *L. niger* L. which tends to develop fewer standing appendage hairs in those areas of Asia and America where its sibling hairless species *alienus* Foerst. is sparse or absent. The common European species *niger*, *alienus*, *flavus* and *umbratus* are apparently also widely distributed in N. America. According to Wilson, there is no basis for distinction between the Eurasian and American forms of these species, although with *alienus* at least there is a marked dissimilarity in nesting behaviour in the two hemispheres. This is in contrast to the position with members of the genera *Formica* and *Myrmica*. These are well represented in both Europe and America, but, so far as is known at present, there are no exact correspondences between the two continents with the possible exception of *Formica fusca* L. and a form of *Myrmica rubra* L. which may have been imported.

In line with many modern taxonomists Wilson regards the species as the only taxonomic unit having any objective status. The geographic race or subspecies can be defined within arbitrary limits, but these break down when the range of variation is studied over a wide area and, as with *Lasius*, genetically independent characters are found to vary discordantly in different