

**NEW DISTRIBUTIONAL RECORDS FOR THE ANT GENUS
PONERA (HYMENOPTERA: FORMICIDAE) IN
NORTH AMERICA**

The genus *Ponera* consists of 30 living species, mostly confined to the Indo-Australian area (Taylor, 1967; Terayama, 1986). There are two species found in the New World: *P. pennsylvanica* Buckley and *P. exotica* M. Smith. Both are small, rarely collected ants found in soil and leaf litter, most commonly in mesic areas of the southeastern part of the United States. Little is known about them due to the small colony size and their cryptic habits. *Ponera exotica* has been reported from only a few localities in North Carolina, Florida and Oklahoma (Taylor, 1967; Johnson, 1987). It has close affinities with the Indo-Australian fauna, which led Smith (1962) and Taylor (1967) to conclude that it had been introduced into the New World from that area.

We have studied several series of both species and report on considerable range extensions from Kansas, Arkansas, Louisiana (new state records for *P. exotica*), Texas (new state records for both species) and Michoacan (Mexico, new country record for *P. pennsylvanica*). It is apparent that *P. exotica* is part of our native fauna (Johnson, 1987).

The ants were collected by sieving mesic forest leaf litter from each of the localities through a 1.25 cm mesh sieve, and then extracting the insects using Berlese funnels. Specimens were preserved in 70% ethanol.

Ponera pennsylvanica is widely distributed over much of the eastern and central United States and extreme southern Canada (Fig. 1) and is now reported from southwestern Mexico. New distributional records in the USA include ARKANSAS: Cross Co., Village Creek State Park. Pike Co., Center of Diamonds State Park. Pulaski Co., Pinnacle Mountain State Park. KANSAS: Wallace Co., Sharon Springs. MISSISSIPPI: Clark Co., Clark State Park. TEXAS: Houston Co., Big Slough Wilderness. Polk Co., Big Thicket Natural Preserve. Sabine Co., 3 km W Brookeland and 14.5 km E Hemphill. Smith Co., Tyler State Park. Taylor Co., Big Thicket Natural Preserve and Spurger. Walker Co., Huntsville State Park. Wood Co., 3.5 mi W Hawkins. A

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Figs. 1, 2. 1. The distribution of *Ponera pennsylvanica*. Circles are our records, stippled areas and squares are from the literature (Taylor, 1967; Browne and Gregg, 1969; DuBois, 1985; Wheeler and Wheeler, 1988). Only collection points at the edge of the range of the distribution are shown. 2. The distribution of *Ponera exotica*. Circles are our records, squares are from literature records (Taylor, 1967; Johnson, 1987).