

THE ANTS (HYM., FORMICIDAE) OF NIUE,
SOUTH WEST PACIFIC

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ABSTRACT

Ant material collected in Niue during April 1996 included 28 species, of which 14 are new records for the island. The total number of ant species known from Niue is now 35. Notes are given on the species, including information about biology, taxonomy and distribution.

INTRODUCTION

Niue, with a surface area of 258 sq km, is the world's largest uplifted coral island. It is situated in the south western part of the Pacific Ocean, between Tonga and the Cook Islands. As the island is only sparsely inhabited (present population about 2000), relatively large areas of rainforest and secondary forest regrowth have survived.

Wilson & Taylor (1967) discussed the ants of the Pacific region. No material from Niue was included in their study. However, in the same year Taylor recorded 19 species that had been collected in Niue by the New Zealand entomologists G.W. Ramsay and A.C. Eyles (Taylor, 1967). In 1994, Puzatchenko *et al.* published a list of 11 species collected on the island by biologists aboard the ship 'Kallisto'.

A.v.H. visited Niue from 16–24 April 1996 to assist the island authorities with their biological pest control programme. At that time he was working with the South Pacific Commission – German Biological Control Project, and used the opportunity to collect ants. Samples were taken from all parts of the island, with special emphasis on the Huvalu Forest. The ants were sent to C.A.C., who identified 28 species, 14 of which had not before been recorded from Niue (Table 1).

NOTES ON THE SPECIES

Subfamily Ponerinae

Ponera tenuis is one of the smaller species of the genus, with a head width of less than 0.5mm. It is widely distributed in the Samoan Island complex and in New Guinea, and has generally been collected in rain forest from rotten logs and in leaf litter.

Hypoponera punctatissima has an enormous range through the Old World tropics and has been recorded frequently from rubbish dumps in cool temperate zones and in heated premises as far north as the British Isles. Males are apterous, but winged females are regularly taken in water and light traps, and by general sweeping.

The single *Amblyopone* specimen was damaged, with the head and pronotum missing. It was dark brown in colour and could not be identified to species.

Odontomachus simillimus is a large predatory species found mostly on