

Lasius austriacus* sp.n., a Central European Ant Related to the Invasive Species *Lasius neglectus

by

Birgit C. Schlick-Steiner¹, Florian M. Steiner¹, Stefan Schödl² & Bernhard Seifert³

ABSTRACT

Lasius austriacus sp.n., a xerothermophilic ant with mainly subterranean life habits, is described. The new species is related to the pest ant *L. neglectus* Van Loon, Boomsma & Andrasfalvy 1990 and *L. turcicus* Santschi 1921. *L. austriacus* was found to be associated with the grass mealybug *Euripersia europaea* Newstead 1897. The presently known distribution range is restricted to Austria (three populations) and the Czech Republic (one population), the Czech population so far had erroneously been referred to as the only known *L. neglectus* population in a natural habitat in Europe. *L. austriacus* offers an opportunity to elucidate the evolution of the notorious pest species *L. neglectus*.

Key words: Hymenoptera, Formicidae, *Lasius austriacus*, new species, taxonomic description, SEM, Austria, Czech Republic

INTRODUCTION

The Palaearctic *brunneus* group of the subgenus *Lasius* s.str. presently contains *L. brunneus* (Latrelle 1798), *L. himalayanus* Forel 1917, *L. lasiooides* (Emery 1869), *L. neglectus* Van Loon, Boomsma & Andrasfalvy 1990 and *L. turcicus* Santschi 1921. *L. neglectus* has gained a doubtful reputation. The species probably originates from Asia Minor and has every characteristic of a tramp species (Passera 1994); it is currently spreading all over Europe (Seifert 2000). Its potential impact on the native ant fauna is comparable to that of *Linepithema humile* (Mayr 1868) (Espadaler & Rey 2001, cf. Giraud *et al.* 2002). The need to remedy this situation has made *L. neglectus* the object of intense investigations with respect to phylogeny, ecology, biology and social organization. *L. austriacus* sp.n. is related to *L. neglectus* and offers an opportunity to elucidate the evolution of the notorious pest species.

¹Institut für Zoologie, Universität für Bodenkultur, Gregor-Mendel-Str. 33, A-1180 Wien, AUSTRIA. E-mail: h9304696@edv1.boku.ac.at

²Naturhistorisches Museum, Internationales Forschungsinstitut für Insektenkunde der 2. Zoologischen Abteilung, Burgring 7, A-1014 Wien, AUSTRIA. E-mail: stefan.schoedl@nhm-wien.ac.at

³Staatliches Museum für Naturkunde Görlitz, PSF 300154, D-02826 Görlitz, GERMANY. E-mail: bernhard.seifert@smng.smwk.sachsen.de