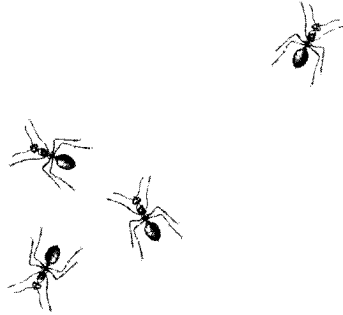


Major Regional and Type Collections of Ants (Formicidae) of the World and Sources for the Identification of Ant Species

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This chapter lists the main depositories of formicid type specimens, provides a database of regional collections of ants, and comments on the main resources for identifying ant genera and species. One of the reasons for studying and cataloguing diversity is that it is the major prerequisite for understanding how biological systems work (May 1990). Catalogues are unquestionably indispensable to the support of systematics and other biological research.

The synoptic classification of ants by Bolton (1995a) is based on his new catalogue of the world's fauna (Bolton 1995b). Deleting taxa known to be currently in press but not published by the limit date of 31 December 1993, Bolton (1995a) accepts as valid 16 subfamilies, 59 tribes, and 296 genera, and he lists 9538 described extant species. Bolton (1995b) also lists

the suprageneric, genus- and species-rank taxa known only from fossils.

The world catalogue brings together all names published thus far for the extant and fossil ant fauna, listing every publication on ant taxonomy and related fields of study from 1758 to the present. The estimated size of the world ant fauna, however—including those still to be described—elevates this number to a total of 20,000 species, or possibly more (Hölldobler and Wilson 1990).

Thus at least half of the world's ant fauna remains to be described, and it will mostly be found in the tropical part of the world, as one of the few relatively indisputable generalizations in community ecology is that a latitudinal gradient in biological species richness and diversity exists from the temperate regions to the tropics