

Introduction

Over the last decade, ant taxonomy has experienced a renewal in Europe due to the description of new species (Seifert 2005), the revision of genera or species groups (e.g. Radchenko and Elmes 2003, Rigato 2011) and the publication of checklists of the ant fauna of several European countries (e.g. Austria: Steiner et al. 2003, Benelux: Boer 2010, Bulgaria: Lapeva-Gjonova et al. 2010, Croatia: Bračko 2006; Romania: Markó et al. 2006, Montenegro: Karaman 2009, Poland: Czechowski et al. 2012, Slovenia: Bračko 2007). This renewal is also due to the publication of excellent taxonomic keys for ant identification (e.g. Seifert 2007, Boer 2010, Radchenko and Elmes 2010), the development of Internet databases accessible on-line (e.g. antbase.org: antbase.org; Ant Genera of the World: www.antmacroecology.org; AntWeb: www.antweb.org), as well as to the use of molecular approaches that have helped to resolve old and debated taxonomical problems (Bernasconi et al. 2011).

Despite the acknowledged importance of mountain ecosystems (Kollmair et al. 2005) in conservation issues, little information is available in the literature on the ant diversity of European mountains. A case in point is the Pyrenees. These mountains have always been of great interest for naturalists because they are characterized by a relatively high rate of endemism of both animal (e.g. Deharveng 1996, Brown et al. 2009) and plant species (Villar and Dendaletche 1994). The Pyrenees are particularly interesting for myrmecologists because they are located in a climatic zone which covers three different regions from a biogeographical point of view: Alpine, Mediterranean and Atlantic. The principality of Andorra (Figure 1) is a small landlocked country located in the heart of the Pyrenees which is bordered by Spain and France and covers an area of approximately 468 km² (Degage and Duro i Arajol 1998). Its relief mainly consists of fluvial valleys and rugged mountains spreading on an altitude ranging from

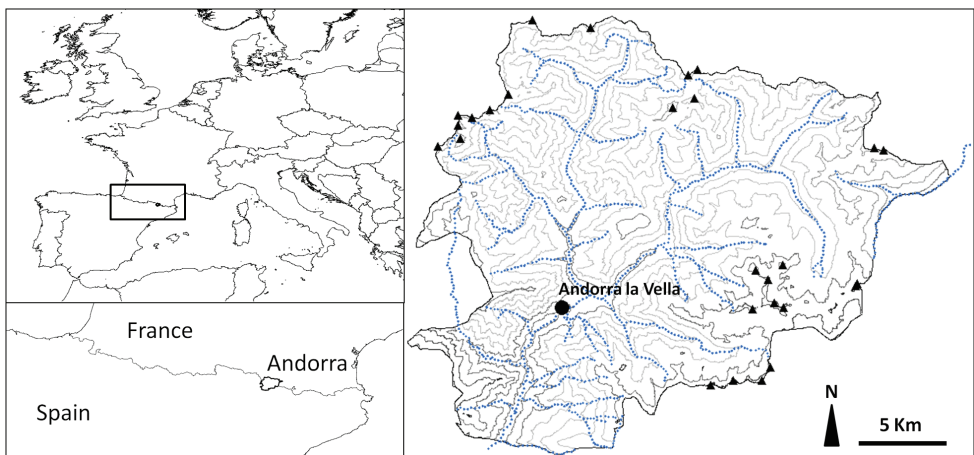


Figure 1. Map of Andorra (from light to dark grey: contour lines every 250 meters from low to high altitude, dotted lines: main Andorran rivers, triangles: peaks over 2800m).