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TAXA OF THE NEOTROPICAL GRASS-CUTTING ANTS, *ACROMYRMEX (MOELLERIUS)* (HYMENOPTERA: FORMICIDAE: ATTINI)

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ABSTRACT: Biological and distributional data are given for the described taxa of Acromymex (Moellerius). A. (M.) balzani *and* A. (M.) fracticornis *are restored to species status, while* A. (M.) mesopotamicus *is synonymized with* A. (M.) silvestri. *The status of the enigmatic* A. (M.) pulverus *is discussed. Varietal taxa are synonymized, and subspecific taxa are synonymized with the exceptions of* A. (M.) balzani pampanus, *while* myersi *is transferred to subspecific status of* landolti. *The taxa are examined with respect to their biogeography.* A. (M.) landolti *is reinterpreted, and a Pleistocene refugia pattern of species distributions is suggested.*

KEY-WORDS: Acromymex; Moellerius; *taxonomy; distribution grass-cutting ants.*

INTRODUCTION

The subgenus *Moellerius* of the attine genus *Acromyrmex* is of considerable interest for two major reasons. Firstly, the taxa that comprise this subgenus are of open or shrub rangelands, and are generally harvesters of grasses. Due to this behavior, certain taxa are considered as primary rangeland pests of the Neotropics[24, 25]. Secondly, these same taxa are considered to evidence a morphological transition between taxa of *Acromyrmex (Acromyrmex)* and *Atta,* principally based on the reduction of the medial pronotal spines[8]. If such is indeed the case, our current concepts of the evolution of leaf-cutting ants may be radically altered.

In this contribution, I review the taxa currently known to comprise the subgenus *Moellerius*. It is hoped that this present contribution will help to resolve the taxonomy of this unique group of ants, and to eventually enable future interpretations of attine phylogeny and evolution. Much of this work was completed during the time period 1980 to 1982. Because the late GONÇALVES[29] was at that time revising the genus *Acromyrmex,* I exchanged my views with him, and was anxiously awaiting his complete revision. Unfortunately, his efforts were cut short by his death following a long illness, and I have decided to present the results of my work, dedicating this contribution to the memory of him.

BIONOMICS

As in all attines, taxa of *Moellerius* are fungus-growers and have an obligate symbiotic relationship with their fungus[55]. As like taxa of the genus *Atta*, taxa of the genus *Acromyrmex*

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