

A REVIEW OF *PARATOPULA* WHEELER,
A FORGOTTEN GENUS OF MYRMICINE ANTS
(HYM., FORMICIDAE)

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ABSTRACT

The small myrmicine genus *Paratopula* Wheeler is defined and reviewed for the first time. Four new species are described (*ankistra*, *catocha*, *demeta*, *macta*) and tentative associations of workers with sexual forms are made where possible. Nine named species are recognized in the genus. The species *oculatus* (Smith), originally described in *Cerapachys* (Ponerinae) is transferred into *Paratopula*, as is *andamanensis* (Forel), originally described in *Tetraponera* (= *Sima*) (Pseudomyrmecinae). Keys are presented for the workers and known males and the history and affinities of the genus are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Paratopula is a very poorly known and little understood genus of myrmicine ants, some of whose component species have been widely scattered in the Formicidae. The purpose of this paper is to define the genus, which has never been formally undertaken, and to present a synopsis of what little is known, or can be inferred, about the genus and its components.

The relatively few valid species of *Paratopula* (9) all appear to be arboreal and are restricted in distribution to the Oriental and Indo-Australian zoogeographical regions, the centre of speciation being in Borneo. Their representation in the world's leading collections of ants is very sparse and their biology remains utterly unknown. Added to this lack of general knowledge is the confusion caused in the past by attempts to place members of the genus in or near other supposedly related groups. For example, one of the earliest described species currently retained in the genus, *ceylonica*, was originally described (Emery, 1901) in *Atopomyrmex*, now a solely Afrotropical genus (Bolton, 1981). It was later shifted (Emery, 1912) into the spurious genus *Atopula*, which is now a junior synonym of *Tetramorium* as its type-species was found to belong in this latter genus (Bolton, 1976; 1980). Other species formerly placed in *Atopula* are now dispersed as shown in the table below.

The year after Emery's description Forel (1902) described a second species, *taylori*, but placed it in *Leptothorax*. He later realized (Forel, 1913b) that *taylori* was close to *ceylonica*, and accordingly shifted the former into *Atopula*, which at that time was also the generic combination of *ceylonica*. In a later publication Forel (1917) changed his mind again and regarded both as components of *Leptothorax*. Wheeler (1919) created the genus *Paratopula* for *ceylonica* and its few described relatives and varieties as he disagreed with Forel's (1917) interpretation. He also stated that they could not be retained in *Atopula*, though he did not give any reasons why this should be so. Finally Emery (1922), in his