

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Insecta Mundi

Center for Systematic Entomology, Gainesville,
Florida

March 1995

Book Review: *Identification Guide to the Ant Genera of the World* by Barry Bolton

Arnold Van Pelt
Greensboro, NC

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/insectamundi>



Part of the [Entomology Commons](#)

Van Pelt, Arnold, "Book Review: *Identification Guide to the Ant Genera of the World* by Barry Bolton" (1995). *Insecta Mundi*. 160.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/insectamundi/160>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for Systematic Entomology, Gainesville, Florida at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Insecta Mundi by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Book Review

Identification Guide to the Ant Genera of the World. Barry Bolton. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA. 1994. 222 pp. Illustr. ISBN: 0-674-44280-6. \$65.00.

Bolton's aim in producing this book was to provide a means of identifying all extant ant genera, and to produce a catalog of existing and fossil genera, as well as the tribes and subfamilies of Formicidae. In accomplishing this goal, he has been thorough, meticulous, and lucid in his revision.

The major thrust of the book is a series of dichotomous keys to the subfamilies and genera of ants. He has done a splendid job in making these keys useful for the specialist, the student or nonprofessional. For the most part, he has avoided "stranded" measurements, such as "not extremely elongate" and "run-on" adverbs, *e.g.*, "evenly transversely convex ventrally." Should one find a term in the keys that is not clear, there is an excellent glossary with line drawings. Perhaps the most innovative and helpful aspects of the book are the 522 scanning electron microscope photographs of ants representing genera to which the keys refer. Once the reader has used the key and referred to the appropriate plate, light microscope identifications should be considerably more reliable.

The key to the genera of each subfamily is followed by a "Synoptic Classification" in which all extant and extinct species, and their synonymies, are listed. There follows a section on the zoogeographical distribution of the genera in that subfamily; a "Faunistic Studies References" page cites papers which have keys to the species of all the genera of that region.

The last pages of the book contain a listing of the currently recognized available genera, tribes and subfamilies, as well as subgenera and extinct taxa. A bibliography of pertinent taxonomic literature is presented, and is cross-referenced to the "Taxonomic References" section under each subfamily.

Schemes of classification, and keys based on them, can appear uninteresting to the novice, and if there is disagreement with the construction of couplets of the keys, or with some of the groupings of taxa within the classification, it may seem a product of a "do it my way" complex. But systematics is dynamic, responding to new knowledge and new insights. It is not just a best guess, but best thorough assessment by professionals who methodically build the structure of a classification with world wide representatives of the taxa.

Bolton's admirable book, keying and imaging 296 extant genera, and 16 subfamilies of ants, is a best thorough assessment, and will be a necessity for ant taxonomists and important for anyone attempting to identify genera of ants.

- Arnold Van Pelt, Greensboro, NC 27455