

Book Review

Ants of North America: A Guide to the Genera by Brian Fisher & Stefan Cover. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007. 308 pp. Paperback. ISBN-13: 978-0520254220. £19.95

Ants of North America: A Guide to the Genera is a refreshingly simple guide to the identification and ecology of this important group of insects. The most recent work before this dealing exclusively with the North American fauna was W.S. Creighton's *The Ants of North America* (1950). The taxonomy in this work is now out of date, and while the keys to genus level at least have been superseded by those in newer volumes (Cover, 1990; Bolton, 1994), before now there has been no concise, user-friendly guide to this group for the North American region. In the preface the authors promise us that this is a small down payment on the much larger undertaking of writing a modern guide to the North American ant fauna at species level. This will be a monumental work and, if this book is anything to go by, an excellent one.

The book provides an illustrated key to the 73 genera known from the region and provides a description of each. The key has been tested and refined through use by successive years of students attending the ant course run by the authors in Arizona. Each couplet is detailed, with most using more than one character, and each is illustrated with line drawings on the same page, in which the characters used are clearly labelled. This makes the key a pleasure to use and should allow for rapid learning and identification of the North American genera for myrmecologists with all degrees of experience. The use of arcane terminology has been restricted and all terms used are detailed in a glossary. There is no information on how to collect and mount specimens prior to identification, which might have been useful in a book that

will be of great interest to the non-specialist. But this information is already available from many other sources and so this is not a major omission. There follows an alphabetically ordered list of the genera. The entry for each genus consists of a description of its combination of unique diagnostic features, along with notes on distribution and ecology, and lateral and frontal view photographs of a mounted specimen of one species. This ability to compare specimens to photographs of correctly identified ones is invaluable, in particular when one is unfamiliar with the 'jizz' of a particular genus. The photographs presented are also part of the larger AntWeb catalogue at www.antweb.org, for which Brian Fisher is the project leader.

The publication of such an accessible guide will serve dual purposes. It should encourage interest in this group from those unfamiliar with it, and will also serve as a valuable reference for more experienced ant enthusiasts. Brian Fisher and Stefan Cover have done a masterful job in presenting the North American ant fauna in such an easily digestible but comprehensive volume. This is a must-have guide for North American myrmecologists.

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REFERENCES

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- Creighton WS. 1950.** The Ants of North America. *Bulletin of the Museum of Comparative Zoology* **104**: 1–585.