**Linepithema humile**

**System:** Terrestrial

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kingdom</th>
<th>Phylum</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Order</th>
<th>Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Animalia</td>
<td>Arthropoda</td>
<td>Insecta</td>
<td>Hymenoptera</td>
<td>Formicidae</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Common name**
Argentina Ameise (German), Argentine ant (English), formiga-Argentina (Portuguese, Brazil)

**Synonym**
*Iridomyrmex humilis*, (Mayr, 1868)

**Similar species**

**Summary**
Linepithema humile (the Argentine ant) invades sub-tropical and temperate regions and is established on six continents. Introduced populations exhibit a different genetic and social makeup that confers a higher level of invasiveness (due to an increase in cooperation between workers in the colony). This allows the formation of fast growing, high density colonies, which place huge pressures on native ecosystems. For example, Linepithema humile is the greatest threat to the survival of various endemic Hawaiian arthropods and displaces native ant species around the world (some of which may be important seed-dispersers or plant-pollinators) resulting in a decrease in ant biodiversity and the disruption of native ecosystems.

View this species on IUCN Red List

**Species Description**

Argentine ant (*Linepithema humile*) workers are monomorphic, displaying no physical differentiation (Holway et al. 2002a). The workers of this species are small, medium to dark brown ants, reaching 2 to 3mm in length. Body surface is smooth and shiny and lacks hairs on the dorsum of the head and thorax. The petiole is composed of a single, scale-like segment, and sting is absent. Workers are extremely fast moving and industrious, often recruiting in high numbers. Please click on AntWeb: *Linepithema humile* for more images and assistance with identification. The AntWeb image comparison tool lets you compare images of ants at the subfamily, genus, species or specimen level. You may also specify which types of images you would like to compare: head, profile, dorsal, or label.

Please see PaDIL (Pests and Diseases Image Library) Species Content Page Ants: Argentine ant for high quality diagnostic and overview images.

Please follow this link for a fully illustrated Lucid key to common invasive ants [Hymenoptera: Formicidae] of the Pacific Island region [requires the most recent version of Java installed]. The factsheet on *Linepithema humile* contains an overview, diagnostic features, comparison charts, images, nomenclature and links. (Sarnat, 2008)
Notes
The change in the structure of Argentine ant (*Linepithema humile*) colonies in introduced populations (i.e. in non-native regions) is due to the genetic makeup of such colonies (Tsutsui et al. 2000; Tsutsui and Suarez 2003). These “uniclonal” colonies consist of workers that lack internest aggression, allowing workers to co-operate together as one supercolony, optimising foraging range and efficiency. This trait is greatly advantageous and allows ant colonies to attain high local densities and dominate ecosystems rapidly (McGlynn 1999; Holway et al. 2002a; Ness and Bronstein 2004). The mechanisms required for workers to recognise workers from a different colony are believed to be dependant on genetic mechanisms (i.e. differences). Researchers believe that because introduced populations have a lower level of genetic diversity compared with parent populations (due to having experienced a “population bottle-neck”) there is insufficient genetic diversity between workers for ants to be able to recognise workers as belonging to a different colony (Tsutsui et al. 2000). It has been suggested that the introduction of new alleles into introduced populations could increase genetic differentiation sufficient to trigger intraspecific aggression (which would alter colony structure, leading to a decrease in ant densities). On the other hand, populations with low levels of genetic diversity have underlying inherent traits that reduce adaptive ability in the long run and this control method may prevent the natural breakdown of uniclonal colonies over time (Tsutsui et al. 2000).

Lifecycle Stages
Virgin queens are believed to mate in the nest and disperse through budding rather than participating in a nuptial flight, resulting in the formation of large, many-queened, cooperating uniclonies (Markin, 1968). Queens may be killed by workers after one year and replaced by newly mated queens (Markin, 1970; Keller et al., 1989).

Habitat Description
The physical environment may highly influence the suitability of a given habitat for a competitively dominant invader such as the Argentine ant (*Linepithema humile*) (Holway 2002b). The optimal environment for Argentine ants is characterised by moderate temperatures and moisture levels. In arid regions, including the *fynbos* of South Africa and the scrublands of California, invasiveness is limited by temperature, as Argentine ants are less temperature tolerant than native ants (Witt and Giliomee 1999, Temper 1976, in Holway 2002b). In field trials foraging activity ceases at around 40°C - 44°C, with maximum foraging occurring 34°C (Holway 2002b). Moisture gradients also regulate invasiveness; Argentine ants generally penetrate further into mesic (moist and green) habitats than into xeric habitats (dry and sparse). For example, evidence from California has shown that Argentine ants disperse faster near perennial streams than near intermittent streams (Holway 1998, in Holway 2002b).

Some abiotic factors are known to potentially regulate Argentine ant invasiveness; in Australia the large biodiversity of the ant genus *Iridomyrmex* confers a certain level of natural resistance to some habitats (Majer 1994, Andersen 1997, and Hoffmann et al. 1999, in Holway et al. 2002a). Humans predispose habitats to Argentine ant invasion as they create mesic habitats within arid zones through the modification of land. For example, in San Diego, runoff resulting from irrigation and human dwellings increases natural runoff by more than four-fold (Holway 2002b). This forms habitats more suitable to Argentine ant colonisation, indirectly opening up environments to ant invasions. A study by Suarez, Bolger, and Case (1998), conducted in California, showed the Argentine ant to be more abundant near developed areas.
Reproduction
Sexual, haplodiploid system. Although the workers of all invasive ants are sterile, the Argentine ant (*Linepithema humile*) can rear eggs and early instar larvae into sexuals in the absence of queens. It is not known whether orphaned colonies of other invasive ants are able to develop into reproductive viable colonies despite the absence of a queen (Holway et al. 2002a).

Nutrition
In Argentina, the Argentine ant (*Linepithema humile*) is commonly referred to as the sugar ant: a fitting name given its preference for sweet substances (Newell and Barber 1913, in Holway et al. 2002a). In line with this observation, baiting trials suggest that *L. humile* considers carbohydrate-rich resources such as honey or water equally, if not more attractive than protein-rich resources (Ness and Bronstein 2004). However, the ant has an overall generalised diet (similar to other invasive ants), including nectar, insects, carrion and honeydew secreted by Homopteran insects (Woodworth 1908, Horton 1918, Mallis 1942, Flanders 1943, Creighton 1950, Markin 1970a, in Suarez Bolger and Case 1998).

General Impacts
While the Argentine ant (*Linepithema humile*) is associated with disturbed habitats throughout its introduced range, it can penetrate native habitats that have experienced little human disturbance. Examples include: *matorral* in Chile, *fynbos* in South Africa, coastal sage scrub in southern California, riparian woodlands in California, subalpine shrubland in Hawaii, and oak and pine woodland in Portugal (Fuentes 1991, Bond and Slingsby 1984, Suarez Bolger and Case 1998, Ward 1987, Holway 1998, Cole et al. 1992, in Suarez Holway and Case 2001). *L. humile* is a dominant ant and an aggressive competitor. It has displaced native ant species in an ecologically sensitive area in Spain (Carpintero et al. 2005) and has been associated with local extinctions of native ants in California (Suarez Bolger and Case 1998). Californian ants that are especially sensitive to displacement are army ants (*Neivamyrmex* spp.) and harvester ants (genera *Messor* and *Pogonomyrmex*), both of which are important ecosystem regulators (Suarez Bolger and Case 1998). *Monomorium* species, such as *M. ergatogyna*, may persist because of their chemical defences or their tolerance of higher temperatures (Holway 1999, Adams and Traniello 1981, Andersen et al. 1991, in Holway et al. 2002a). In introduced regions *L. humile* may be displaced by the red imported fire ant (*Solenopsis invicta*), another invasive ant (Holway et al. 2002a).

Invasive ants have a great potential to alter ecosystem processes, including ant-mediated seed dispersal or plant pollination. In California the removal of seeds produced by the myrmecochorous (ant-dispersed) tree poppy *Dendromecon rigida* is less in areas inhabited by the Argentine ant (*L. humile*) than in areas inhabited by the common harvester ant (*Pogonomyrmex subnitidus*) (Carney et al. 2003). A similar outcome has occurred in the South African *fynbos*, where the displacement of large native ants by *L. humile* has lead to a reduction in the dispersal of large ant-dispersed seeds and a reduction in the reproduction of those plants (Christian 2001, Holway et al. 2002a).

Native arthropods are greatly threatened by Argentine ants. In South Africa, the Argentine ant can collect up to 42% of available nectar before bees can forage (Buys 1987, in Holway et al. 2002a). In Hawaii the Argentine ant reduces numbers of many native arthropods, including essential pollinators (Cole et al. 1992, in Krushelnycky et al. 2004), the loss of which could threaten insect-pollinated plants such as the endangered “silversword” (*Argyroxyphium* spp.)
Management Info
Preventative measures: The Pacific Ant Prevention Programme is a proposal prepared for the Pacific Plant Protection Organisation and Regional Technical Meeting for Plant Protection. The plan aims to prevent the red imported fire ant and other invasive ant species with economic, environmental or social impacts from establishing within, or spreading between, countries in the Pacific.

Please see Linepithema humile information sheet, prepared as part of ‘The invasive ant risk assessment project’, Harris et al. 2005, for Biosecurity New Zealand by Landcare Research. Hartley et al. (2006) modelled the potential future range of the Argentine ant. They found that it is most likely to occur where the mean daily temperature in mid-winter is 7-14°C and maximum daily temperatures during the hottest month average 19-30°C. Uninvaded regions considered vulnerable to future establishment include: southern China, Taiwan, Zimbabwe, central Madagascar, Morocco, high-elevation Ethiopia, Yemen and a number of oceanic islands.

Integrated management: The potential of invasive ants to reach high densities is greater in human-modified ecosystems; particularly in land intensely utilised for primary production. For example, L. humile reaches high densities in agricultural systems, such as citrus orchards, that host Homopteran honey-dew producing insects (Armbrecht and Ulloa-Chacón 2003; Holway et al. 2002a). Improved land management, including a reduction in monoculture and an increase in the efficiency of primary production, may help prevent ant population explosions, alleviate the problems caused by high densities of ants and reduce sources of ant infestation.

Please follow this link for more detailed information on the management of the Argentine ant Linepithema humile compiled by the ISSG.

Pathway
Argentine ants were commonly found in cargo coming from California in the early part of the 20th century (Zimmerman 1941, in Earham College 2002). For example, early this century it was noted that nearly every one of over 100 steamships landing between New Orleans and Baton Rouge, Louisiana, was heavily invested with Argentine ants (Newell and Barber 1913, Barber 1916, in Suarez Holway and Case 2001). Nest fragments may be moved by transport vehicles. Colony establishment may be achieved by relatively small propagules, with as little as a single queen and 10 workers required for the establishment of a new colony (Hee et al. 2000). Argentine ants were brought to Hawaii with troops in the Second World War (Passera 1990, in Earham College 2002).

Principal source:

Compiler: Paul Krushelnycky, University of California at Berkeley; Andrew Suarez, University of California at Berkeley & IUCN/SSC Invasive Species Specialist Group (ISSG)

Review: Paul Krushelnycky, University of California at Berkeley; Andrew Suarez, University of California at Berkeley.

Publication date: 2009-08-04

ALIEN RANGE
FULL ACCOUNT FOR: Linepithema humile

The invasive ant risk assessment project, prepared for Biosecurity New Zealand by Landcare Research, synthesises information on the ant species that occur in New Zealand (native and introduced species), and on invasive ants that pose a potential threat to New Zealand. There is a great deal of information in this risk assessment on invasive ant species that is of global interest, including; biology, distribution, pest status, control technologies.

The assessment project has five sections: 1) The Ants of New Zealand: information sheets on all native and introduced ants established in New Zealand. 2) Preliminary invasive ant risk assessment: risk scorecard to quantify the threat to New Zealand of 75 ant species. 3) Information sheets on invasive ant threats: information sheets on all ant species scored as medium to high risk (n = 39). 4) Pest risk assessment: A detailed pest risk assessment for the eight species ranked as having the highest potential risk to New Zealand. (Anoplolepis gracilipes, Lasius neglectus, Monomorium destructor, Paratrechina longicornis, Solenopsis geminata, Solenopsis richteri, Tapinoma melanocephalum, Wasmannia auropunctata) 5) Ranking of high risk species: ranking of the eight highest risk ant species in terms of the risks of entry, establishment, spread, and detrimental consequences.

NB. The red imported fire ant (Solenopsis invicta) is considered to be the worst ant pest in the world. However, Solenopsis invicta was specifically excluded from consideration in this risk assessment as this species has already been subject to detailed consideration by Biosecurity New Zealand.

This invasive ant pest risk assessment was funded by Biosecurity New Zealand and Foundation for Research, Science and Technology. Undertaken by Landcare Research in collaboration with Victoria University of Wellington and Otago Museum.


Harris, R.J., 2001. Argentine ant (Linepithema humile) and other adventive ants in New Zealand. DOC Internal Series 7


Summary: Provides a brief review of Argentine ant control efforts, particularly work at Haleakala National Park in Hawaii prior to 1997.


Summary: A year-long study determining the seasonal preferences of baits that could potentially be used in control efforts.


Summary: An initial attempt to eradicate Argentine ants from test plots in Haleakala National Park, using standard Maxforce bait as well as new bait varieties formulated with hydramethylyn. Was unsuccessful in achieving eradication.

**Summary:** Eradication case study In Turning the tide: the eradication of invasive species.


**Summary:** Discusses over a dozen of the worst arthropod pests in the South Pacific, with particular emphasis on ants and their control and management.


**Summary:** A proposal prepared for the Pacific Plant Protection Organisation and Regional Technical Meeting For Plant Protection. This plan aims to prevent the red imported fire ant and other invasive ant species with economic, environmental and/or social impacts, entering and establishing in or spreading between (or within) countries of the Pacific Region.

Sarnat, E. M. (December 4, 2008) PI key: Identification guide to ants of the Pacific Islands, Edition 2.0, Lucid v. 3.4, USDA/APHIS/PPQ Center for Plant Health Science and Technology and University of California ? Davis.

**Summary:** PI key (Pacific Invasive Ant key) is an electronic guide designed to assist users identify invasive ant species commonly encountered in the Pacific Island region. The guide covers four subfamilies, 20 genera and 44 species. The primary tool offered by PIkey is an interactive key designed using Lucid3 software. In addition to being fully illustrated, the Lucid key allows users to enter at multiple character points, skip unknown characters, and find the most efficient path for identifying the available taxa. Each species is linked to its own web page. These species pages, or factsheets, are linked to an illustrated glossary of morphological terms, and include the following seven sections: 1) Overview of the species; 2) Diagnostic chart illustrating a unique combination of identification characters; 3) Comparison chart illustrating differences among species of similar appearance; 4) Video clip of the species behavior at food baits (where available); 5) Image gallery that includes original specimen images and live images (where available); 6) Nomenclature section detailing the taxonomic history of the species, and 7) Links and references section for additional literature and online resources.


Tasman District Council (TDC) & Biosecurity New Zealand Summary of proceedings: New Zealand Invasive Ant Workshop: Argentine Ant (*Linepithema humile*) & Darwin Ant (*Doleromyrma darwiniarena*). 29th April 2005


**Summary:** Reports on effort to eradicate the Argentine ant in Western Australia.


**Summary:** This database compiles information on alien species from British Overseas Territories. Available from: http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-3660 [Accessed 10 November 2009]

**Summary:** PaDiL (Pests and Diseases Image Library) is a Commonwealth Government initiative, developed and built by Museum Victoria’s Online Publishing Team, with support provided by DAFF (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) and PHA (Plant Health Australia), a non-profit public company. Project partners also include Museum Victoria, the Western Australian Department of Agriculture and the Queensland University of Technology. The aim of the project is:
1) Production of high quality images showing primarily exotic targeted organisms of plant health concern to Australia.
2) Assist with plant health diagnostics in all areas, from initial to high level. 3) Capacity building for diagnostics in plant health, including linkage developments between training and research organisations. 4) Create and use educational tools for training undergraduates/postgraduates. 5) Engender public awareness about plant health concerns in Australia. PaDiL is available from: http://www.padil.gov.au/aboutOverview.aspx, this page is available from:

**General information**


**Summary:** Found that the exclusion of native ants by Argentine ants led to decreased rates of seed dispersal in plants adapted to ant-mediated seed dispersal.


**Summary:** Found that the Argentine ant significantly reduces the abundances of a number of endemic and introduced arthropods


**English:**

The species list sheet for the Mexican information system on invasive species currently provides information related to Scientific names, family, group and common names, as well as habitat, status of invasion in Mexico, pathways of introduction and links to other specialised websites. Some of the higher risk species already have a direct link to the alert page. It is important to notice that these lists are constantly being updated, please refer to the main page (http://www.conabio.gob.mx/invasoras/index.php/Portada), under the section Novedades for information on updates.

Invasive species - insects is available from:


**Spanish:**

La lista de especies del Sistema de informaci?n sobre especies invasoras de m?xico cuenta actualmente con informaci?n acerca de nombre cient?fico, familia, grupo y nombre com?,n, as? como h?bitat, estado de la invasi?n en M?xico, rutas de introducci?n y a otros sitios especializados. Algunas de las especies de mayor riesgo ya tienen una liga directa a la p?gina de alertas. Es importante recordar que estas listas se encuentran en constante proceso de actualizaci?n, por favor consulte la portada (http://www.conabio.gob.mx/invasoras/index.php/Portada), en la secci?n de novedades, para conocer los cambios.

Especies invasoras - Insectos is available from:


Earlham College, 2002. *Introduced Species in Hawaii* (Senior Seminar 2002)

**Summary:** Available from: http://www.earlham.edu/~biol/hawaii/ants.htm [Accessed April 10 2006]


**Summary:** A comprehensive review about invasive ants in general.


**Summary:** Using pitfall traps, found that Argentine ants displace nearly all native ants and many non-ant arthropods, and cause a shift in arthropod trophic structure.

**ITIS (Integrated Taxonomic Information System), 2005, Online Database Linepithema humile**

**Summary:** An online database that provides taxonomic information, common names, synonyms and geographical jurisdiction of a species. In addition links are provided to retrieve biological records and collection information from the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) Data Portal and bioscience articles from BioOne journals.

Available from: [Accessed March 2005]


**Summary:** Lab and field work demonstrated that about 90% of mated queens were killed by the workers at the beginning of the reproductive season.


**Summary:** Found that Argentine ants do not reduce nesting success of Hawaiian Dark-rumped petrel in Haleakala National Park, most likely because the deep, shaded burrows constructed by the petrels are cold and may discourage heavy ant foraging.


**Summary:** Provides information on distribution of Argentine ants in Western Australia. In Williams D. F. (ed.) Exotic ants: Biology, impact and control of introduced species: 163-173.


**Summary:** Provides information on distribution of Argentine ants in Western Australia, and potential abiotic requirements.


**Summary:** A great summary bibliography of Argentine ant research sorted by topic, found on the South African Museum webpage.


**Summary:** A useful resource reviewing and summarizing Argentine ant colonizations worldwide, as well as a finer scale analysis of spread throughout the U.S. and local expansion rates.


**Summary:** Found that exclusion of native ants by Argentine ants led to a diet shift in coastal horned lizards, and densities of juvenile lizards were low in Argentine ant invaded areas.


**Summary:** The social structure and genetics of Argentine ants in their native and introduced ranges.


**Summary:** The social structure and genetics of Argentine ants in their native and introduced ranges.

**Summary:** Using genetic tools to identify the source of invasive Argentine ant populations.

