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The crazy ant, *Paratrechina longicornis* (Latreille)

(HYMENOPTERA: FORMICIDAE)[1]

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INTRODUCTION: The crazy ant, ***Paratrechina longicornis*** (Latreille), is found in various parts of the world and was introduced into the United States (Smith 1965). The name "crazy ant" arises from its characteristic erratic and rapid movement. It is so morphologically distinctive that it is one of the few ***Paratrechina*** that is not consistently misidentified in collections (Trager, 1984).

The synonomy (from Creighton, 195Ø) is:

Formica longicornis Latreille (18Ø2)
Prenolepis longicornis: Roger (1863)
Prenolepis (Nylanderia) longicornis: Emery (191Ø)
Formica vagans Jerdon (1851)
Formica gracilescens Nylander (1856)
Tapinoma gracilescens: F. Smith (1858)
Paratrechina currens Motschoulsky (1863)
Paratrechina longicornis (Latreille), Emery (1925)

DISTRIBUTION: It is found in tropical cities world-wide (Trager, 1984) and it occurs from Florida to South Carolina and west to Texas in the U.S. It also is found sporadically in residences and warehouses over much of the eastern U. S. (Creighton, 195Ø) and in California and Arizona (Trager, 1984).

DESCRIPTION: Antennae are 12-segmented without a club. The scape is extraordinarily long with the apex surpassing the posterior border of the head by at least one-half the scape length. Eyes are elliptical, strongly convex, and placed close to the posterior border of the head. Legs are extraordinarily long. The petiole is wedge-shaped, with a broad base, and inclined forward. A small round terminal orifice surrounded by a fringe of setae, the acedipore, serves for the application of venom both in defense and predation. The stinger is lacking. Workers are 2.3-3 mm long. The body has long, coarse, well-scattered, suberect to erect, grayish or whitish setae. The head, thorax, petiole, and gaster are dark brown to blackish (Creighton, 195Ø); the body often has faint bluish iridescence.

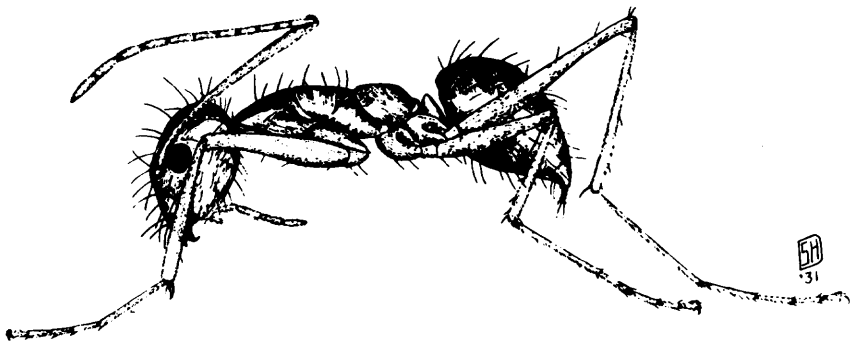

Fig. 1. Crazy ant worker, ***Paratrechina longicornis*** (from M. R. Smith).

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BIOLOGY AND BEHAVIOR: The slender-bodied, long-legged worker is capable of extremely rapid movement. It is highly adaptable, living in both very dry and rather moist habitats. It nests in such places as trash, refuse, cavities in plants and trees, rotten wood, and in soil under objects (Smith 1965). Wilson and Taylor (1969) reported that it penetrates Polynesian rain forests in areas with depauperate native ant fauna.

Workers are omnivorous, feeding on both live and dead insects, seeds, honeydew, fruits, plant exudates, and many household foods. They obtain honeydew by tending aphids, mealybugs, and soft scales (Smith 1965). In Gainesville, Florida, it thrives at gasoline stations, convenience stores, and sidewalk cafes where workers may be seen transporting crumbs and dead insects attracted to lights. They apparently have a seasonal preference for a high-protein diet, and during the summer months may refuse honey or sugar baits. They are attracted to honeydew producing homopterans in spring and fall. Large prey items are carried by a highly concerted group action (Trager 1984).

Colonies are moderate to very populous. They may raise sexuals at any time of the year in warmer regions, but in the seasonal climate of Gainesville, alate production is apparently limited to the warm rainy months of May through September (Trager, 1984). Trager (1984) observed that the nuptial flights are abortive. On warm, humid evenings, large numbers of males gather outside nest entrances and may mill about excitedly. Workers patrol vegetation and other structures nearby. Periodicially, a dealate queen emerges. Mating was not observed, but Trager (1984) suggested that it occurred in such groupings around the nest entrance. Wings of queens are removed while still callow and males were never observed to fly or use their wings in any way; however, in other localities, males frequently appear at lights.

ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE: Marlatt (193Ø) observed that the crazy ant is a pest in Florida and the Gulf States and has been found even on top floors of large apartment buildings in New York, hotels and flats in Boston; and in hotel kitchens in San Francisco, California, and it is a common pest in greenhouses in Europe.

The workers are known to gather small seeds of such crops as lettuce and tobacco from seed beds. In cold climates, the ants nest in apartments and other buildings where they are potential pests the year round. Workers feed on many household foods such as meats, grease, sweets, fruits, vegetables, and liquids (Smith, 1965).

In 1977, modular units, serving as temporary school rooms, were being used by a North Lauderdale elementary school. The principal reported that the units were so inundated by the ant that students were constantly in a state of turmoil. The invasion reached such proportions that the students' sack lunches were kept in closed plastic bags placed on tables with each table leg sitting in a pan of water as a barrier to the ant.

DETECTION AND CONTROL: The crazy ant is extremely easy to identify on-sight by observing its rapid and erratic movements. Confirmation may be made with the aid of a hand lens through which the extremely long antennal scape, long legs, and erect setae are very apparent.

Non-chemical control is based on exclusion through good housekeeping practices and cleanliness eliminating food sources. Indoor chemical controls are based on baits, dusts, and spot treatments with residual sprays. Outdoor treatments include chemical formulations as baits, granules, dusts, and sprays. Consult your local County Agricultural Extension Agent for approved insecticides for ant control. Read and follow label instructions and precautions before using any insecticide.

LITERATURE CITED:

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