
SOUTHERN ANT

Monomorium antarcticum



M. antarcticum is by far New Zealand's most universal ant species, being found throughout the North and South Islands, on Stewart I., Three Kings Is, Chatham Is and offshore islands.

Polymorphic, length 3 - 5 mm; antennae 12-segmented; mandibles usually 5-toothed; metanotal groove distinct or feebly impressed; smooth and shiny without sharp spines on the propodeum; some antarcticum populations have blunt spines on the propodeum; body colour variable (but uniform within a colony) — orange, yellowish brown, dark brown, black; in all colour forms, apart from black, the antennae and legs are a different shade from the body.

This species is a generalist, preying on small insects, scavenging and "milking" homopterans. Small seeds may be harvested, suggesting a possible impact on the establishment of pasture grasses. Workers forage haphazardly rather than following specific routes, which is in line with the apparent absence of trail pheromones (Blum 1966). Nests can be small or highly populous with thousands of workers; construction can be complex with galleries at different levels, particularly in soil under stones. Nests also occur in and under rotting logs. Habitats exploited include native forests and grasslands, pastures and household gardens.

Commonly sampled in pitfall traps and litter and moss extractions and workers are attracted to a wide variety of baits.

Common in urban environments. Can be a minor nuisance due to their attraction to a variety of foods, but do not forage indoors. They have a strong bite.