

*Labidus coecus* as a cave ant

Ants are seldom if at all truly cavernicolous. The meager food supply in caves is usually adverse to the establishment of whole colonies of social insects. Most cave ants hitherto reported are therefore really spelaeoxenes, i. e. fortuitous or transitory elements in this particular ecological niche, belonging indeed to highly adaptable species, which regularly nest in forests or in open country.

Even the presumably true cave ant *Spelaemyrmex urichi* Wheeler (1922, Amer. Mus. Novit. n. 45, pp. 9-11), originally described from Guácharo cave on the island of Trinidad, was later also found in leaf mould on the island of Cuba by P. J. Darlington, Jr., being thus a member of Silvestri's "microgenton". The tiny geobiont ant species may of course be taken as "microcavernicolous". There is no distinct dividing line between these and "macrocavernicolous" species (cf. Wheeler, 1938, Carnegie Inst. Wash. Publ. n. 491, p. 251).

The following records refer to an ant species not heretofore detected in caves. Both catches are from guácharo caves in northern South America. The guácharo or fat-bird, *Steatornis caripensis* Humboldt, belongs to the order of Caprimulgiformes. It is a rather huge and peculiar species of night hawks, restricted to South America and living from plant seeds and nesting in caves.

The first sample of ants comes from northern Peru. At San Andrés, 30 km northeast of Cutervo, at an altitude of 2600 m, there is a guácharo cave which attains a horizontal depth of 300 m. Dr. W. Weyrauch of Lima, Peru, investigated this cave for two full days and made a careful survey of its fauna. On January 21, 1959, at a distance of 90 m from the mouth of the cave, in complete darkness, he discovered on the floor a tunnel built of earth crumbs. Inside the tunnel was a weak raiding column of an army ant species, which I was able to identify as *Labidus coecus* (Latreille, 1802). In spite of diligent search no other ants were found in this cave.

Lic. Juhani Ojasti, of the Universidad Central de Venezuela, discovered on December 28, 1959 the same *Labidus coecus* in the famous Cueva del Guácharo, in the Caripe valley, Monagas State, northeastern Venezuela. This cave was first made known by A. von Humboldt, and is the place where he discovered the fat-bird, hitherto unknown to science. Mr. Ojasti's sample of *Labidus coecus* was taken inside the cave at a distance of 800 m from the mouth, at an altitude of 1060 m.

Both samples showed no specific adaptation to cave life, except for averaging a bit paler in color. This is the first cave record for *Labidus coecus*, one of the commonest and most highly adaptable army ant species, which ranges from southern United States to northern Argentina. It occurs practically in all types of environment, and has been found both at sea-level and at altitudes of well over 2000 m in the Andes. The detail that struck me most was contained in Dr. Weyrauch's account: Notwithstanding the complete darkness reigning in the cave of northern Peru, the ants still insisted in covering their raiding trails with soil crumbs and other material, a habit of theirs so often observed in open countries at day-light.

W. W. Kempf