

Research article

## *Acromyrmex insinuator* new species: an incipient social parasite of fungus-growing ants

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### Summary

The two known social parasites of fungus-growing ants (tribe Attini) occupy an advanced grade of social parasitism characterized by absence of a worker caste and highly derived morphology and behavior. In contrast, the Panamanian *Acromyrmex insinuator* new species, described here, appears to occupy an early grade of social parasitism in which males, females, and minor workers are nearly indistinguishable from those of the host species. Based on allozyme and morphological evidence, the host, *A. octospinosus* ssp. *echinator*, is clearly different and reproductively isolated from the sympatric *A. octospinosus* ssp. *octospinosus*, and is therefore elevated to species status.

### Introduction

The 203 species of fungus-growing ants (subfamily Myrmicinae, tribe Attini) cultivate fungus gardens upon which they obligately depend for nourishment. Two social parasite species are exceptions to this rule, consuming but presumably not cultivating the fungus of their hosts. Males and females of these species are so morphologically aberrant that Gallardo (1916) erected the monotypic genus *Pseudoatta* to receive the northern Argentinean species *Pseudoatta argentina*. Because one of the first specimens was received along with two workers of *Acromyrmex balzani*, the latter species was initially suspected to serve as the host (Gallardo, 1916; Santschi, 1926); however, subsequent work established that both the typical form of *P. argentina* and the dubious subspecies *P. argentina platensis* parasitize *Acromyrmex lundii*

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