BIRD FECES CONSUMPTION BY FIRE ANT
SOLENOPSIS GEMINATA
(HYMENOPTERA: FORMICIDAE)1

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The fire-ant genus Solenopsis is native to South America, but is an invasive genus in the United States (Callcott and Collins 1996), Caribbean Islands (Davis et al., 2001) and recently in Australia (Solley et al., 2002) and New Zealand (Harris 2001). Its population can reach high densities and raid crops (Morrison et al., 2004). They also cause damage to human health, wildlife, machinery and electrical equipment (Morrison et al., 2004).

The diversity in the diet of ants has been widely studied (Went et al., 1972; Abbott 1978; Josens et al., 1998; Blüthgen and Fiedler 2004; Dussutour and Simpson 2009). In particular, there are several dietary studies in Solenopsis sp. They consume crops, seeds, insects, homopterans honeydew and a variety of solid and liquid plant and/or animal matter (Hays and Hays 1959; Ali et al., 1984; Drees et al., 1991; Kaakeh and Dutcher 1992; Hooper and Rost 1997; Vogt et al., 2002). Tennant and Potter (1991) report feces as an item collected.

The aim of this note is to describe an incidental observation of consumption of birds feces by workers of Solenopsis geminata.

This observation was made in a garden at a residential area in the southeast of Caracas, Venezuela. I made this observation the morning of 22 February 2014 at 10am. I collected the ants in a 4 ml glass vial containing 2 ml of 70% ethanol (Fig. 1), for identification at the Laboratory of Ornithology, Universidad Simón Bolívar (Caracas, Venezuela).

I observed the consumption of feces from a mistnetted Blue-gray tanager Thraupis episcopus (Thraupidae), by 5 workers of the fire ant S. geminata (Fig. 1). The feces were mainly composed of papaya (Carica papaya) pulp. A few minutes after the birds defecated, the workers of S. geminata began to feed for about half an hour.

Feces consumption is reported in several ant species. The species Cephalotes atratus (Jaffe et al., 2001) and Camponotus sericeiventris (Giumarães et al., 2006) collect birds feces, which are then carried to the nest. Different ant species extract the seeds of capuchin monkey feces (Pizo and Oliveira 1999) and frugiv-