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FIRST RECORD OF THE ANT *RHOPALOTHRIX WEBERI* (HYMENOPTERA: FORMICIDAE: MYRMICINAE) FOR MEXICO

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The genus *Rhopalothrix* Mayr is a member of the monophyletic tribe Basicerotini (Bolton 1998). It is a rare group of ants with 10 known species, 7 of which are distributed across Central and South America and the rest in the Indo-Australian region. The biology of this genus is not well known, but it seems to exhibit the same predatory habits as other members of the tribe; the few basicerotines whose habits are known are predators of small, soft-bodied arthropods (Wilson 1956; Brown & Kempf 1960; Wilson & Brown 1985; Longino 1999).

Ants of this genus have 7-segmented antennae that, when reclined against the head in their normal position, are sustained on the antennal scrobes that run beneath the eyes. Their mandibles are slender and elongate; when completely shut, they remain separated due to a cavity that runs along most of their length and touches only at the tips. These ants are similar to *Eurhopalothrix,* but with thinner, more elongate, triangular jaws.

In this paper we report the first record of *Rhopalothrix weberi* Brown and Kempf for Mexico. Until now, the only known record of the genus in this country was for *R. stannardi* in the state of Chiapas (Brown & Kempf 1960). During a sampling project to study the ant fauna associated with patches of cloud forest in the central part of the state of Veracruz, 1 worker of this species was collected from a litter sample processed in Winkler bags. Although we processed more than 120 samples of litter from cloud forest and coffee plantations in this zone, only 1 specimen was obtained. The collection of these ants tends to be quite scattered; as in this case, they are generally found as isolated individuals obtained from litter samples processed in Winkler traps or Berlesse funnels (Longino 1999; Brown & Kempf 1960). The *R. weberi* worker was collected near "El Olmo", situated on the road between Teocelo and Ixhuacan de Los Reyes in the municipality of the same name (latitude 19°20'15"N; longitude 97°01' 42"W), at an altitude of 1300 m (Aug 12, 2008, J. Valenzuela Col.). It was sampled in a patch of cloud forest of about 8 ha located on hilltops surrounded by coffee plantations.

The ant was identified with keys and descriptions provided by Brown & Kempf (1960) as well as Weber's original description of this species, as *Heptastruma wheeleri* (Weber 1934). The specimen has the following features characteristic of the description of *R. weberi*. The dorsum of head with a pair of well-defined transverse ridges; clypeus without conspicuous subappressed, oval setae; labrum with a deep median cleft or notch that extends inward from its apex nearly to its midlength with rounded lateral lobes (Fig. 1);

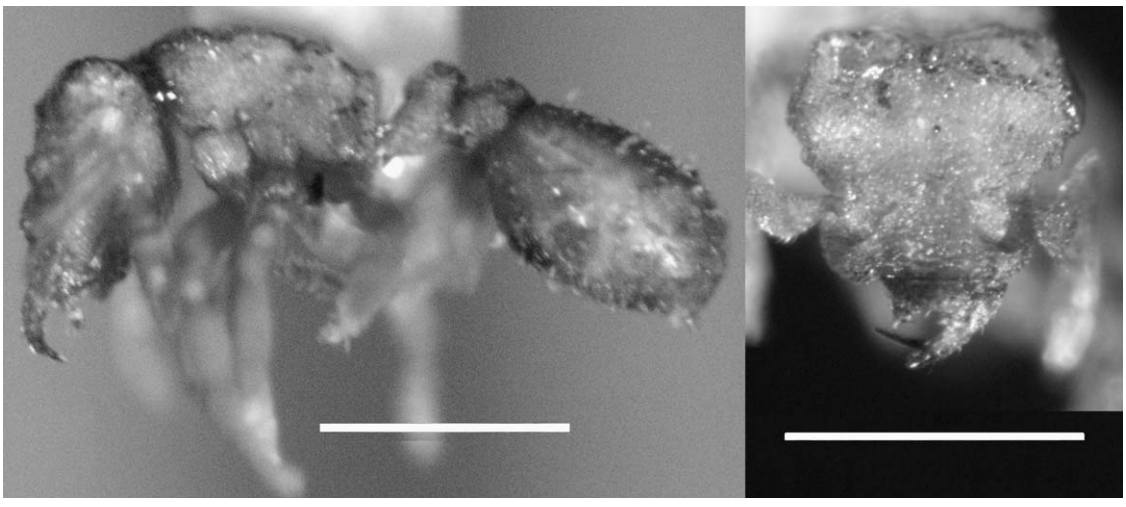


Fig. 1. Side view (left) and face view (right) of the *R. weberi* worker collected. Scale bars equal 0.5 mm.

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subapical tooth of spiniform mandible not longer than the basal width of mandible; anterior clypeal margin concave in the middle; posterior half of head lacking erect or spatulate pilosity; the presence of 2 intercalate denticles between apical and subapical teeth; ferruginous red in color.

This species is similar to *R. isthmica,* known from Panama, which also has a labrum with a cleft in the middle, although it is easily distinguished from *R. weberi* because the former lacks transverse ridges on its head, has well-defined propodeal spines, and is larger in size. The only other species of this genus known from Mexico, *R. stannardi*, is easily distinguished from *R. weberi* due to its lack of a deeply notched labrum.

To date, the known distribution for *R. weberi* is Guyana, Costa Rica, and Cuba (Brown & Kempf 1960; Kempf 1972; Longino 1999; Lapolla et al. 2007). With the present record, its distribution is expanded more than 1,500 km toward the north, constituting the most northerly record of *R. weberi* on continental America.

This specimen was deposited in the entomological collection of the Instituto de Ecología in Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico (IEXA; Reg. SEMARNAT: Ver. IN. 048.0198).

Summary

We present the first record of the presence of *Rhopalothrix weberi* Brown and Kempf in Mexico. A worker was obtained from a litter sample processed in a Winkler bag. The specimen was collected in a patch of cloud forest located in the mountainous region of central Veracruz (latitude 19°20' 5"N; longitude 97°01'42"W) at an altitude of 1300 m in the municipality of Ixhuacan de Los Reyes. This record increases the distribution of this species by over 1800 k to the north, constituting the most northerly record of this genus in continental America.

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