
NATURE NOTE

An Observation of Nest Relocation in the Ant *Cephalotes atratus*

Colonies of most ants, like other social insects, tend to inhabit fixed nests. However, movement from one nest site to another is known to occur at least occasionally in many species. Based on a systematic study of four north-american species, Smallwood (1982) concluded that nest relocation is much commoner in forest ants than had been supposed.

One of the more conspicuous ants in Trinidad forests is *Cephalotes atratus*, the giant turtle ant. This relatively large, all-black ant has a very broad, flattened head. It nests arboreally and is often seen walking in loose columns on tree trunks, fallen logs and across the forest floor. Despite its commonness and striking appearance, it has been the subject of just one substantial behavioural-ecological study (Corn 1980).

On 15 July, 2003, we came upon a fairly strong column of *Cephalotes* workers crossing a broad trail in the Arena Forest Reserve, central Trinidad. Movement was almost entirely in one direction. The ants descended one tree trunk and ascended another trunk about seven metres away. Aside from its nearly one-directional nature, the notable feature of this column was that a large minority

of the larger workers carried smaller workers in their mandibles. Carried workers had the body curled and were plainly alive, their antennae and tarsi twitching. Closer examination showed that a small minority of workers carried larvae in their mandibles.

Although we were unable to see either the old or new nest of this *Cephalotes* colony, it was plain that a relocation was underway. The queen presumably walked to the new nest either before or after our observation period. Corn (1980) described workers carrying dead nest-mates out of the nest, but she made no mention of carrying live nest-mates or brood. This appears to be the first report of nest relocation in this species.

REFERENCES

- Corn, M. L. 1980. Polymorphism and polyethism in the neotropical ant *Cephalotes atratus* (L.). *Insectes Sociaux*, 27: 29-42.
Smallwood, J. 1982. Nest relocation in ants. *Insectes Sociaux*, 29: 138-147.

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