

Camponotus planatus (Hymenoptera: Formicidae), an Exotic Carpenter Ant Found in Mississippi

Joe MacGown

Mississippi Entomological Museum, Mississippi State University, Mississippi State, MS, 39762

Corresponding Author: Joe MacGown- JMacGown@entomology.msstate.edu

The compact carpenter ant, *Camponotus planatus* Roger (Hymenoptera: Formicidae), occurs in the Caribbean Region and ranges from Columbia to Texas, and it has been introduced into Florida, Hawaii, and the Galapagos Islands (Creighton 1950, McGlynn 1999, Wetterer and Wetterer 2003). In Florida, it is only known to occur in the southern half of the state (Deyrup 1991, Deyrup et al. 1988, Deyrup et al. 2000, Klotz et al. 1995) where it is considered an occasional structural pest (Warner and Scheffrahan 2005).

On 7 October 2009, workers of *C. planatus* were collected in Bay St. Louis, Hancock County, Mississippi at a nursery that specializes in palms (Arecaceae). Many of the palm trees at the nursery were imported from Florida, which has the highest number of exotic ants in the United States (Deyrup et al. 2000), several of which are known to be associated with palms. Nurseries such as this one have an increased likelihood of receiving introduced species of ants from Florida and may serve as a gateway for exotic ants entering Mississippi. In fact, a visit to this same nursery in April of 2008 by MacGown and J. G. Hill resulted in the discovery of another exotic species new for Mississippi, *Tapinoma melanocephalum* (Fabricius), the ghost ant (MacGown and Hill 2009). The carpenter ants were likely introduced to the nursery in

palms shipped from Florida, as this species is known to nest in leaf axils of palms (Warner and Scheffrahan 2005). *Camponotus planatus* workers were observed moving in trails along the irrigation system on the ground and crawling up and down sabal palms (*Sabal palmetto* (Walt.) Lodd), which were planted directly in the soil (rather than in pots). Workers were fast moving and difficult to collect. Colonies were not discovered, but foraging workers were observed moving toward the uppermost parts of palms, where nests presumably were located. MacGown and Hill did not observe this species during their visit in 2008. Return visits to the area will be made to determine whether or not this species becomes established.

Camponotus planatus (Figure 1) can be easily distinguished from other carpenter ants in this region by the following characteristics: relative small size with workers ranging from 3 to 6 mm in overall length; the gaster black and the rest of the body reddish-brown; and presence of abundant, long, white setae on much of the body except for the scapes. Nests are often difficult to locate, but may be found in hollow twigs, old termite galleries in dead wood, grass culms, voids in tree trunks, and leaf axils of palms (Deyrup et al. 1988, Warner and Scheffrahan 2005).

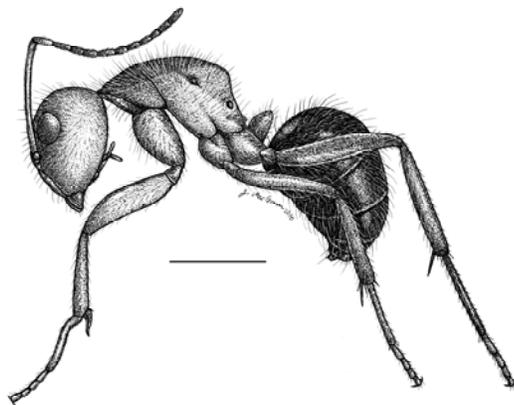


Figure 1. Profile view of a *Camponotus planatus* worker. Scale bar equals 1.0 mm.

In addition to this carpenter ant, four other exotic species were collected at the site, including *T. melanocephalum*, *Brachymyrmex patagonicus* Mayr (the dark rover ant), *Paratrechina longicornis* (the crazy ant), and *Solenopsis invicta* Buren (the red imported fire ant) all of which were found during the first visit to the nursery in 2008 by MacGown and Hill (MacGown and Hill 2009). Of note was the fact that *T. melanocephalum* was still present at the site, having survived targeted control efforts, several days of sub-freezing temperatures, and mild flooding, which occurred as a result of Hurricane Gustav in late August 2008. In fact, this species appeared to be much more abundant than the previous year and multiple colonies with dealate queens were discovered nesting under the bark of numerous palms. Foraging workers of *P. longicornis* were found at the site and were also found at a gas station approximately one mile east of the nursery. Both *B. patagonicus* and *S. invicta* are well established in southern Mississippi; thus, their high levels were expected.

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