FIRST RECORD OF *EPITRITUS* FROM NORTH AMERICA (HYMENOPTERA: FORMICIDAE)

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The genus *Epitritus* includes 4 described species, one each from Nigeria, Japan, the Mediterranean area (Brown 1962), and Malaysia (Taylor 1968). Members of the genus are apparently seldom collected, even in their native lands, and seem rather unlikely candidates for accidental importation into the U.S. Nevertheless, Brown, with remarkable prescience, suggested in 1949 that *E. argiolus* Emery (the only species known at the time) might eventually be found in the southern U.S. Although this species has not been found in North America, another species, *E. hexamerus* Brown does occur in Florida.

Epitritus is distinguished from other dacetine genera by the combination of enlarged labral lobes, strongly curved mandibles, heavy covering of large, disc-tipped hairs, and posteriorly protuberant mesonotum (Fig. 1). A key to 3 species was provided by Brown (1962), and diagnostic characters of the fourth species provided by Taylor (1968). In the North American ant fauna, *E. hexamerus* somewhat resembles *Quadristruma emmae* (Emery), an exotic African species common throughout southern Florida, but *Q. emmae* lacks the enlarged labral lobes, protuberant mesonotum, and disc-tipped mandibular hairs of *E. hexamerus*. *Q. emmae* is a smaller, more delicate-appearing species, and it is unlikely the two species have been confused in collections of Florida ants.

E. hexamerus was described from Japan (Brown 1958), where it occurs in evergreen broadleaf forests (Masuko 1984). Masuko states that this species differs from other

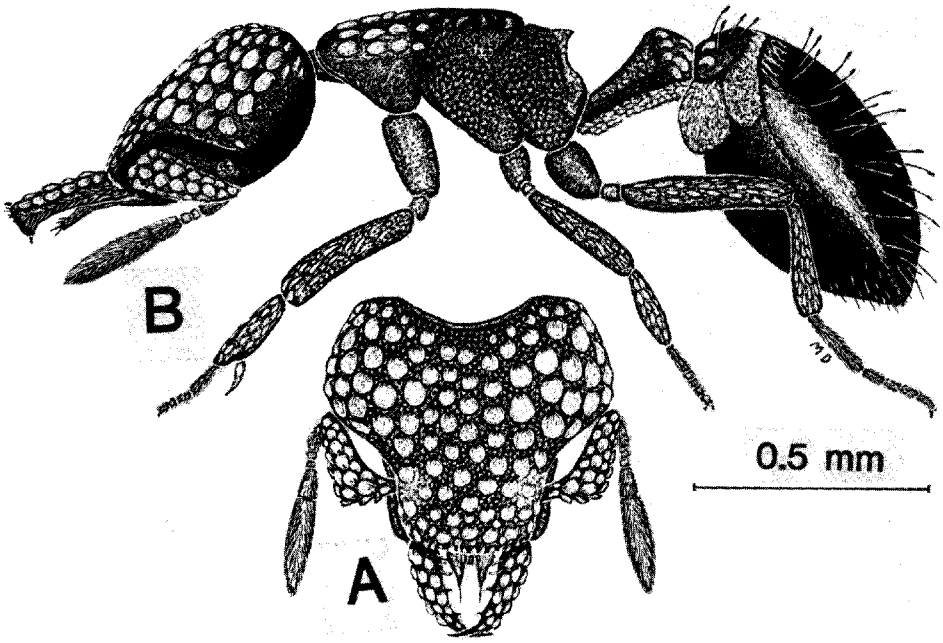

Fig. 1. Frontal view of head of *Epitritus hexamerus* (A) and lateral habitus view (B).

common Japanese dacetines in that it occurs in soil rather than in leaf litter. To summarize Masuko's detailed observations of the hunting behavior, this ant hunts in subterranean cavities or passages; when a potential prey approaches, the ant waits with lowered head. If the prey steps on the ant's head, the head snaps upward and the bear-trap jaws impale the body of the prey, which is then stung and paralyzed. Long-bodied prey, such as diplurans and centipedes, are preferred.

Three workers of *E. hexamerus* were collected on 19 June 1987 by Dr. Walter Suter (Carthage College, Kenosha, Wisc.), using Berlese extraction of leaf litter near a fallen log. The site was a stand of evergreen oaks 3 miles north of Pedro, in southern Marion Co., FL. A subsequent collecting trip to the same fallen log by Dr. Clifford Johnson (University of Florida, Gainesville), produced no additional specimens. It is possible that this species has an extremely localized population, but it is more likely that its subterranean habits have allowed it to escape detection during recent intensive sampling of litter-inhabiting dacetines of Florida. The 3 specimens are deposited in the Florida State Collection of Arthropods (Gainesville), the Archbold Biological Station Collection, and the collection of Clifford Johnson.

I thank Dr. Walter Suter for providing the specimens of *E. hexamerus*, along with innumerable additional specimens of ants collected throughout Florida.

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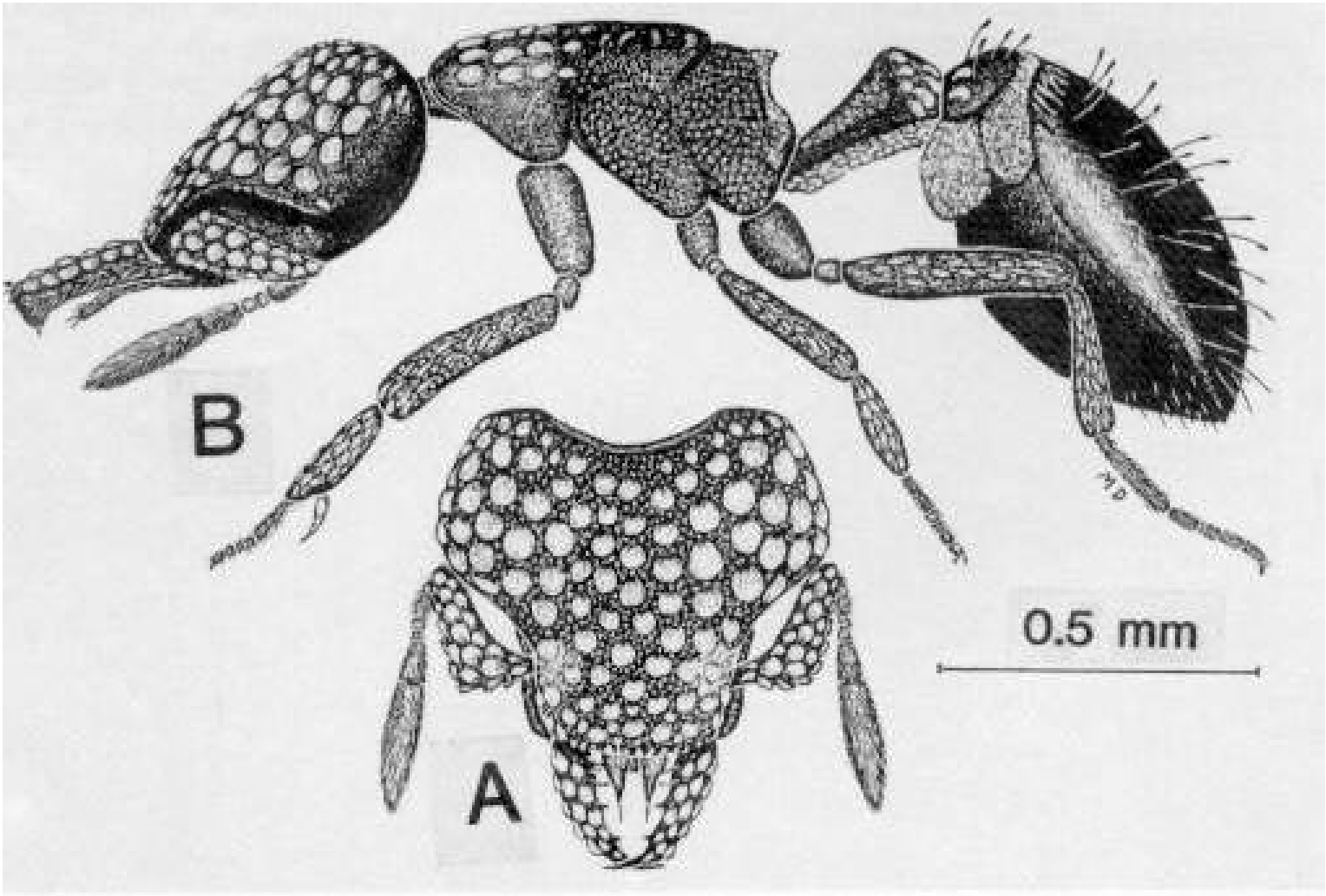
B
A
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