

Asian needle ant

Brachyponera chinensis

What is it?

The Asian needle ant, *Brachyponera chinensis*, is an invasive ant that is becoming an increasingly focused on species of interest due to its ecological impacts on biodiversity and medical risks to human health, via sting-induced anaphylaxis.

Unlike colonies of many invasive ants which dominate urbanised and disturbed habitats, colonies of the Asian needle ant have the unique ability to invade habitats in undisturbed forests.

Asian needle ants cause a strong decline in native ant abundance and disrupt ant-seed dispersal mutualisms by displacing native keystone ant species.

Until 2014 the species was also known as *Pachycondyla chinensis*.

Where has it been found?

The Asian needle ant is native to Japan and is also found in China. It has spread to New Zealand, Cambodia, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam and Republic of Korea. The Asian needle ant has been in the U.S. since the 1930s, but their population has exploded in the past 10 years

What does it look like?

Asian needle ants are a dark brownish-black color, with orange-brown mandibles, legs, antennae, and stingers. Workers are 3.4 to 5.0 mm in length, while queens are significantly larger at 5.0 to 6.0 mm in length. Workers are wingless, while queens and males have wings, although queens lose their wings after mating. These ants have one large petiole, large compound eyes, and a well-defined stinger. Their head is long, and their pronotum and mesonotum are convex in profile. Their head, pronotum, coxae, tibia, and gaster are covered in light, yellowish hair that gives them a bronze luster.



Asian needle ants look innocent but they pack a painful sting
(Image: Benoit Guenard)

Where will I find it?

Asian needle ants build nests in both disturbed areas and natural habitats. They can be found in forests, agricultural land, and in urban and suburban areas, such as parks and backyards.

They prefer nesting in dark, damp areas in soil beneath stones, logs, stumps, and debris

Asian needle ants feed on dead insects, fish scraps, and decaying fruit. They prey on live arthropods, especially termites.

What should I look for?

The Asian needle ant's distinctive walk is a dead giveaway of its identity. While some ant species lift their legs high and prance around or stomp their way to and from their nests, Asian needle ants, hunker down close to the ground and creep with deliberate, stealthy steps. Most invasive ants use mass recruitment via trail pheromones to collect food. In contrast, no trail pheromones have been detected in the Asian needle ant. Instead, the Asian needle ant employs a unique yet relatively slow recruitment process called tandem carrying whereby foraging workers carry nestmates from the nest to the food source which is subsequently retrieved.

If you suspect that you have found ants that are exotic contact
Biosecurity SA or the Exotic Plant Hotline

