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Camponotus vagus SCOPOLI, 1763 (Hymenoptera Formicidae) a new ant species for Belgium ?

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Summary

In Tildonk (Province of Brabant) a nest of *Camponotus vagus* (SCOPOLI, 1763), has been discovered in wooden rails in a garden surrounded with shrubs and trees, making the habitat a thermophilic place. The first foraging workers were observed in February 1998. So far only *Camponotus herculeanus* (LINNAEUS, 1758), *Camponotus ligniperda* (LATREILLE, 1802) and *Camponotus piceus* (LEACH, 1825) were known for Belgium. The species *C. vagus* is a south European species abundantly seen in the Mediterranean area, but also recorded within the area from Portugal to South Russia and from the Mountains of North Africa to Poland. The nest has probably been imported along with the wooden rails. In the Netherlands imported *C. vagus* nests have persisted during 30-40 years and the species was recently added to the Dutch ant fauna. As the nest in Tildonk has already been active for 3 years and also others nests of *C. vagus* might be discovered in the surroundings, this ant species could be added to the Belgian fauna as a doubtful species.

Keywords : Hymenoptera, Formicidae, new record, Belgium, faunistic

Introduction

In the spring of 1998 (until 2000) Mme JANSSENS-VAN POYER, Kapelleweg 10 in Tildonk (Brabant) noticed workers of a nest of big black ants in her garden. The workers were foraging across wooden rails. The origin of the wooden rails is not sure. Maybe the queen of the nest was imported along with wood which is stored in a little factory along the road. The workers were first seen in February when they were foraging on the wood and hiding between the wood and the concrete floor. Shrubs and trees surround the garden, making it a thermophilic habitat. Identification of the workers by Xavier ESPADALER (Barcelona) unmasked the big black ants as *C. vagus*. This species was not yet recorded for Belgium.

The genus *Camponotus* MAYR, 1861 in Belgium

The genus *Camponotus* is a tropical genus, which is sparsely present in Europe. VAN BOVEN & MABELIS (1986) and DE BISEAU & COUVREUR (1994) only mention *C. herculeanus* and *C. ligniperda* as members of the Belgian ant fauna. *C. herculeanus* is only known from the Haute Fagnes (GASPAR, 1971 map 211). This species makes its nest in old rotten wood and fallen trees, but sometimes nests can be found under stones on the ground Even in the Haute Fagnes *C. herculeanus* is a rare species.

C. ligniperda is a more common ant in Belgium. It is frequently observed in the valley of the Meuse and its branches, and in the Haute Fagnes (GASPAR, 1971 map 212; VAN BOVEN & MABELIS, 1986; DE BISEAU & COUVREUR, 1994).

Recently (in the summer of 1998) Mr. BAUGNÉE found a worker of *Camponotus piceus* on a chalky grassland in Treignes (pers. com. BAUGNÉE *in* PAULY, 1999). These recent discoveries of *Camponotus*-workers in Tildonk and Treignes make the Belgian *Camponotus*-group consist of four species.

Camponotus vagus in Europe

According to SEIFERT (1996) *C. vagus* is a xerothermic species which can be found in bright

woods. In central Europe its typical habitats are dunes and pine woods. *C. vagus* ensconces in dead wood and under stones and nests can be found in dry rotten wood among roots. The colonies are monogynous and contain 1000-4000 workers. The colony moves rapidly and can be very aggressive and competitive. The species is both carnivore and aphidicolous and more zoophagic than *C. herculeanus* and *C. ligniperda* (SEIFERT, 1996). According to COLLINWOOD (1979) the species can be found in Sweden, Öland and Gotland, South-West-Finland. In Europe it is abundant in the Mediterranean area. *C. vagus* is also recorded in the area from Portugal to South Russia and from the Mountains of North Africa to Poland (COLLINGWOOD, 1979).

Recently BOER (1999) added the species to the fauna of the Netherlands. In 1960 and 1972 DIJKSTRA introduced two living colonies from western France in the Kenneerduinen in Bloemendaal. In 1997 BOER and DIJKSTRA found a colony near Bloemendaal. As in the neighbourhood some excrements of *Picus viridis* contained remains of workers and as the nest they discovered did not show any symptoms of being attacked by birds, this pointed out the existence of other nests in the neighbourhood (BOER, 1999). This also shows the ability of *C. vagus* to settle, when introduced in to a suitable environment. Earlier DE JONGE (1988) found a nest of the species in a hollow wall in Waddinxveen in roof-insulation imported from the South of France. As later no workers were observed in the neighbourhood and the nest disappeared, this record was classified as a coincidental import of a foreign species.

Recent record of *Camponotus vagus* in Belgium; a new species for the Belgian ant fauna ?

The *C. vagus* workers have been observed for three summers. The number of foraging workers increased during those years. In the summer of 2001 not even one worker had been rediscovered. Maybe the nest was damaged too much during the summer of 2000. It is possible that the nest moved and settled in the surrounding area/neighbourhood. The fact that in the Netherlands an introduction of this species worked out successfully shows the possibility of *C. vagus* to settle, when introduced in a suitable environment as the one near the house of Mm JANSSENS-VAN POYER. Only a detailed and devoted search for new nests of the species in the surrounding area next summer could confirm this hypotheses and add the species to the Belgian ant fauna.

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