

**LASIUS BRUNNEUS (LATREILLE) (HYMENOPTERA:
FORMICIDAE) NEW TO KENT?**

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On 27.vii.1995, whilst carrying out a biological survey of Beckenham Place Park in south-east London between Lewisham and Bromley, I collected a few ants from wood mould in a rotten hollow at the base of a large oak tree (TQ382707). They proved to be *Lasius brunneus* (Lat.). The Park is in vice-county 16 “West Kent”, and it was not until several months later that I discovered this to be a supposed new county record.

In fact *Lasius brunneus* has been found in the vice-county before. Mr A. A. Allen informs me that he found several specimens of this ant at the base of a mature, externally sound sawn tree in Maryon-Wilson Park, Charlton (TQ4178), some ten years ago, but did not publish the record.

Lasius brunneus is described as having a “curious distribution” (Brian, 1977) in the south Midlands. Its stronghold is in the Thames Valley, at the concurrence of vice-counties Surrey, North Hampshire, Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Middlesex (Fig. 1), and its absence from suitable habitat in the New Forest and certain southern counties is often commented upon (Falk, 1991). Its occurrence in Kent may seem to extend the known distribution of this species greatly, but Beckenham Place Park is only a few miles inside the West Kent border and about 15 miles from the ant’s closest Surrey locality in Esher (Gardner, 1972). Charlton is about 4 miles further north-east.

Beckenham Place Park is now a mixture of woodlands, some moderately ancient and some more modern plantations, together with playing fields and a public golf course. The golf course is studded with large trees and pollards and, apart from the

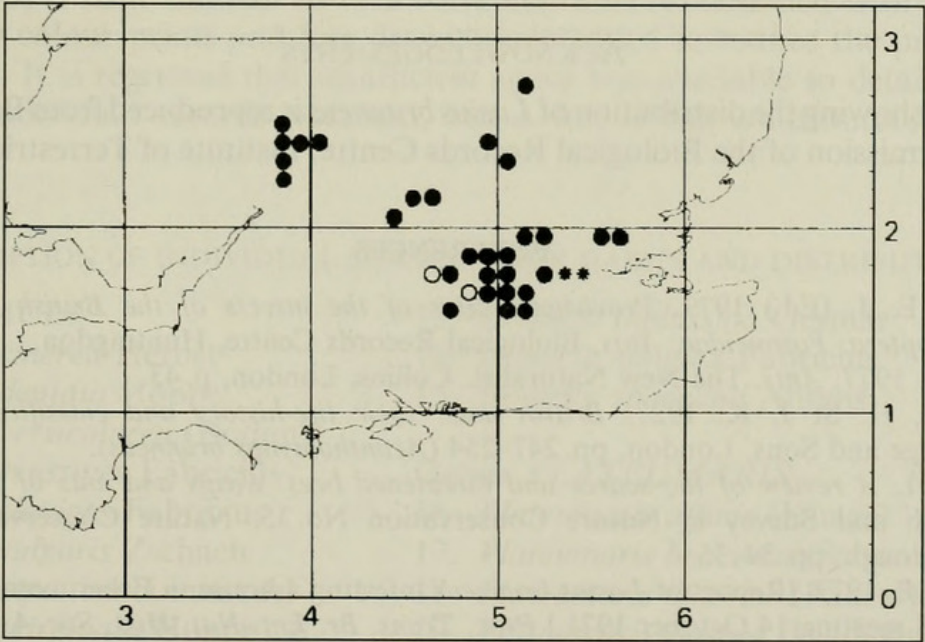


Fig. 1. Provisional distribution of *Lasius brunneus* to July 1979, reproduced from Barrett (1979) with permission. ○ pre-1961 records, ● records 1961 to 1979, * present Kent records from Beckenham (left) and Charlton (right).

closely mown fairways and greens, still retains some of its previous parkland character. It was in one of these large oaks that *Lasius brunneus* was found by reaching into a small hollow at the base of the tree, between the roots, and scooping out handfuls of wood mould and grass. The ants were very plentiful, but none of the many recorded myrmecophilous beetles or other insects were found among them.

Interestingly, there is an old record of *Lasius brunneus* from Kent, by Smith (1858) who reported a single specimen from amongst a number of ants collected at Deal. Donisthorpe (1927, p. 249) dismisses this record as almost certainly a misidentification, but then alludes (p. 251) to the possible occurrence of the ant in a small remnant of forest at West Wickham, Kent, about 3 miles due south of Beckenham Place Park. His reason for this was the discovery there of the false scorpion *Allochernes wideri* (Koch, C.L.), which in Donisthorpe's experience was unlike other tree species in that it always occurred between bark and wood in a space choked with characteristic red powdery debris. In Donisthorpe's opinion this debris suggested the work of ants, and in particular *Lasius brunneus* since he had found the false scorpion associated with this ant in its Berkshire sites.

In fact, the distribution of *Allochernes wideri* extends beyond that of *Lasius brunneus* (Legg & Jones, 1988), with scattered localities as far north as Wakefield in Yorkshire and south and west into the New Forest where *Lasius brunneus* is, as reported above, curiously absent. This suggests that the false scorpion is not such an obligate myrmecophile as Donisthorpe supposed. Nevertheless, there is one especially tantalizing aspect of the false scorpion's distribution in that there is a record for the same Deal area where *Lasius brunneus* is reputed to have occurred.

NOTE ON *LASIUS BRUNNEUS* RECORDS

Lasius brunneus is one of the species being targetted by the Bees, Wasps and Ants Recording Scheme for mapping in an atlas to be published in 1997/8. Records of this species should be sent to: Simon Hoy (PSD), c/o Pest Identification Service, MAFF Harpenden Laboratories, Hatching Green, Harpenden, Hertfordshire AL5 2BD.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The map showing the distribution of *Lasius brunneus* is reproduced from Barrett (1979), with the permission of the Biological Records Centre, Institute of Terrestrial Ecology.

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