

First record of the ant-loving cricket *Myrmecophilus baronii* Baccetti, 1966 in Tunisia, Northern Africa (Orthoptera: Myrmecophilidae)

Thomas Stalling

Abstract

The first record of *Myrmecophilus baronii* Baccetti, 1966, in Tunisia, Northern Africa, is presented. Photographs of this species and its habitat are presented for the first time.

Zusammenfassung

Die ersten Nachweise der Ameisengrillenart *Myrmecophilus baronii* Baccetti, 1966 für Tunesien werden publiziert, ergänzt durch Fotos der Art und ihres Lebensraumes sowie einer Verbreitungskarte. Die Art kommt nicht nur wie bisher angenommen subendemisch auf Malta und Pantelleria (Italien) vor, sondern auch auf dem nordafrikanischen Festland.

Introduction

According to EADES et al. (2014), 57 valid species of ant-loving crickets (genus *Myrmecophilus* Berthold, 1827) have been described worldwide. Of these, only *Myrmecophilus ochraceus* Fischer, 1853, was found in Tunisia (WASMANN 1890). *Myrmecophilus salomonis* Wasmann, 1890, was described from Tunisia, but it was recently recognized as a junior synonym of *M. ochraceus* (STALLING 2010). *Myrmecophilus baronii* Baccetti, 1966, was so far only known from Malta and Pantelleria (Italy), and was presumed to be endemic or sub-endemic to these islands (BACCETTI 1966, BACCETTI et al. 1995, SCHEMBRI 1984, SCHEMBRI, 2003). This study presents the first record of *M. baronii* in Tunisia.

Materials and Methods

During a trip to Tunisia in 2010, several hundred ant nests located beneath stones were checked for ant-loving crickets. All *Myrmecophilus* specimens were caught, preserved in ethanol, and subsequently pinned and dried. The identification of the specimens was assured by direct comparison to the type specimens, which were provided by the City Museum of Natural History Giacomo Doria, Genoa (Italy).

Results

Myrmecophilus baronii was found at two localities in Tunisia in nests of *Campnotus (Tanaemymex)* sp. (all specimens leg. and coll. T. Stalling). At Bir Bou Rebka, Nabeul (N 36°27'03" E 10°34'14", about 50 m a.s.l.), 1 adult male and

1 adult female were found on April 10, 2010. At El-Fahs, Zaghouan (N 36°17'31", E 09°48'33", about 340 m a.s.l.), 1 adult male, 2 adult females, and 1 nymph female were found on 12 April 2010, and 1 adult male, 3 adult females, 1 nymph male (Fig. 1), and 3 nymph females were found on April 14, 2010. The habitat at Bir Bou Rebka was an open pine forest with interspersed shrub, and the habitat at El-Fahs was an uncultivated, stony area at the edge of a pine forest (Fig. 2).



Fig. 1:
Myrmecophilus baronii, male nymph.
14.10.2010, El-Fahs, Zaghouan, Tunisia.



Fig. 2:
Habitat of *Myrmecophilus baronii* in Tunisia. Top: Bir Bou Rebka, Nabeul, 10.04.2010; bottom: El-Fahs, Zaghouan, 12.10.2010.

Discussion

This study presents the first records of *Myrmecophilus baronii* in Tunisia. These records enlarge the known range of this species to the North-African mainland (Fig. 3) and show that *M. baronii* is not endemic or sub-endemic to Malta and Pantelleria, as was assumed by Baccetti (1966), Schembri (1984), and Schembri (2003). The distance from Pantelleria to the Tunisian mainland is about 70 km, and the distance from Pantelleria to the locality where the species was found at Bir Bou Rebka is about 130 km. The species is presumed to occur in adjacent Maghreb countries and possibly also Sicily.

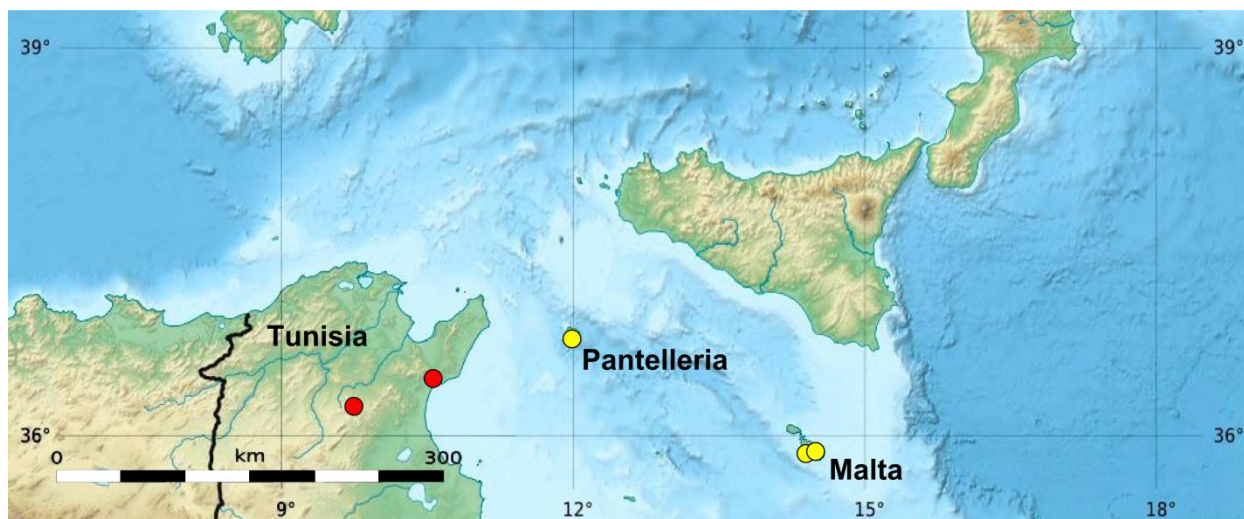


Fig. 3: Distribution of *Myrmecophilus baronii*. Yellow dots: records published by BACCETTI (1966), BACCETTI et al. (1995), and SCHEMBRI (1984); red dots: new records from Tunisia. Based on a map from Eric Gaba, © GNU Free Documentation License.

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Author:
Thomas Stalling
Möndenweg 26
79594 Inzlingen
E-Mail: Stalling@gmx.de

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Autor(en)/Author(s): Stalling Thomas

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