

**OR292**

*The ants of Hispaniola: past, present and future.*

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The Caribbean region is notable for being a biodiversity hotspot. The majority of this diversity is found on the larger islands of the Greater Antilles. Hispaniola, the second largest island, has garnered attention from numerous myrmecologists yet still harbors a poorly characterized ant fauna. There also exists intriguing evidence regarding the insular evolution of some local ant taxa but it is currently not possible to do much more than speculate about taxon specific patterns and potential evolutionary processes due to inadequate sampling. Properly characterizing the island's ant fauna and better understanding its development requires a critical examination of historical specimens and, where possible, additional sampling. Past collections will necessarily have to suffice for some areas. Haiti, occupying the western third of the island, is ecologically decimated. A large majority of the country's natural habitat, and presumably the ant communities they once contained, has been destroyed. The Dominican Republic comprises the remaining two-thirds of Hispaniola. It nominally contains one of the largest and most comprehensive national park systems in the Caribbean. Unfortunately these lands are being steadily degraded by unmanaged anthropogenic conversion. My talk will summarize what is presently known about the Hispaniola ant fauna. This will include a history of ant sampling on the island, what is being learned from the databasing of previously collected specimens, and the results of recent Dominican Republic ant surveys. Despite a summary of our current knowledge showing the potential for promising future studies of Hispaniola's ants, I will close by showing how this research is increasingly imperiled by ongoing threats to the island's existing conservation lands.