



Microgynous queens in *Manica rubida* ants: social parasites or dispersal morphs?



Lenoir Alain¹, Séverine Devers¹, Philippe Marchand¹, Christine Errard¹, Christophe Bressac¹ and Riitta Savolainen²

¹ Université de Tours, IRBI, UMR CNRS 6035, Faculté des Sciences, Parc de Grandmont, 37200 Tours, FR
² Dept of Biological and Environmental Sciences, P.O. Box 65, 00014 University of Helsinki, Finland

Manica rubida colonies contain one or a few large, macrogynous queens. Colony foundation is semi-claustral and takes place after a nuptial flight. In the French Alps (Morillon, Haute-Savoie, 700 m a.s.l.), we discovered in 1998 a colony containing many small alate microgynes, which did not engage in a nuptial flight and stayed in the nest the following winter. We found these microgynes in this nest throughout the following years. The size of all the gynes indicated a completely separate polymorphism. The microgynes had a normal spermatheca and could be fecundated, but rarely (1 of 38 cases). They generally behaved like workers in brood care, though they had wings which they lost with time. One of the gynes presumably tried to found a new colony near the mother colony. In June 2003, we observed a new colony with microgynes 4 km away from the first one. In June 2004, the "mutation" appeared to have spread to the entire valley of 10 km, with colonies having both macrogynes and microgynes, some colonies containing still only macrogynes.

The significance of these microgynes is not yet clear, but there are at least two hypotheses for their existence. (1) **The microgynes are social parasites of *M. rubida*.** A preliminary phylogenetic analysis indicates that *M. rubida* microgyne differs from its host with a few base pairs in the mitochondrial genes COI and COII, suggesting that there is some reproductive isolation between the two morphs. (2) **The microgynes are part of a dispersal strategy.** The small microgynes spread locally from the mother nest, whereas the large macrogynes establish new colonies after a nuptial flight. The presumed dispersal strategy is not totally efficient, however, as the colonies produce many microgynes which stay in the home nest as workers.

