

= Ochetellus =

Ochetellus is a genus of ants first described by Steve Shattuck in 1992 . He placed it in the subfamily Dolichoderinae of the family Formicidae . The ants in this genus are small and black in colour ; workers measure 1 @. @ 75 to 3 millimetres (0 @. @ 07 to 0 @. @ 12 in) in length , the males at around 1 @. @ 6 millimetres (0 @. @ 06 in) are smaller , and the queens are the largest , reaching 4 millimetres (0 @. @ 16 in) . There are seven described species and three described subspecies that mostly live in Australia in a wide variety of habitats , but some species are found in Asia . One species , Ochetellus glaber , has been introduced into New Zealand and the United States .

The colonies are found in rotten wood , in the ground , under rocks or stones and in urban areas . The ants are both diurnal and nocturnal and forage on trees , in low vegetation and into human homes , where they are regarded as pests . These ants eat a variety of foods , including fruits , insects , sucrose , nectar and bird feces . They visit various flowers and attend to a variety of butterfly larvae . The thorny devil , an Australian lizard , predominantly feeds on Ochetellus workers , and other ant species also prey on them .

= = Taxonomy = =

The genus Ochetellus was first described by Steve Shattuck in 1992 , placing it in the subfamily Dolichoderinae . The type species of the genus is Ochetellus glaber , originally described as Hypoclinea glabra by Austrian entomologist Gustav Mayr in 1862 . The genus was originally placed in the tribe Dolichoderini . It was later placed under the tribe Iridomyrmecini , now classified as a synonym for the tribe Leptomyrmecini .

The genus consists of seven species and three subspecies that were previously placed in the genus Iridomyrmex . The genus contains the following species : O. democles , O. epinotalis , O. flavipes , O. glaber , O. punctatissimus , O. sororis and O. vinsoni . The three subspecies classified in this genus are O. glaber clarithorax , O. glaber consimilis and O. glaber sommeri .

= = Description = =

Ochetellus is a genus of small black ants ; each species vary in size , with workers ranging from 1 @. @ 75 to 3 millimetres (0 @. @ 07 to 0 @. @ 12 in) in length and males are smaller at 1 @. @ 6 millimetres (0 @. @ 06 in) . The largest ants in the genus are the queens ; Ochetellus sororis queens measure up to 4 millimetres (0 @. @ 16 in) . While these ants were formerly placed in the genus Iridomyrmex , there are several features that makes these ants distinct ; the compound eyes are differently positioned on the head , and the arrangement of the clypeal margin and mesosoma can also distinguish between the two genera . Ochetellus looks similar to Dolichoderus species , but they are relatively smaller and the petiole is narrow and dorsolaterally expanded . The head is also thinner than most Dolichoderinae ants .

On the head , the occipital border either curves in or curves out , and no ocelli are present . The antennae consist of twelve segments . The mandibles each have six to eight teeth along with a large apical tooth .

= = Distribution and habitat = =

Ochetellus ants are native to Australia and have been introduced into New Zealand . In Asia , they are native to India , Japan , the Philippines and southern Burma . Species are found on the islands of Fiji , Mauritius and New Caledonia . Ochetellus glaber was first sighted in Hawaii in 1977 and is considered an invasive species . Since its introduction , the ant has spread throughout the state , and is now found in Hawaii , Kahoolawe , Kauai , Maui and Oahu . The ant has also been introduced to mainland United States , being found in north @-@ central Florida , where it is localised in Orange County .

Ants of this genus are eurychoric ; they have a widespread geographic distribution in many different climates , but they are usually found in dry and mesic habitats . They are referred to as a tropical genus , but the type specimen was collected from temperate Sydney . They are found in sclerophyll woodland and forests , eucalypt woodland , Casuarina forests , mallee , hillsides , beaches and urban areas . These ants are arboreal ants and nests are located in bark , logs , rotten wood , sand , soil , under rocks and stones , tree stumps and twigs or branches . In urban areas , colonies are found under cracked paths , inside house walls or in patio areas . Some species are considered pests , and they forage into pastures and houses where they show a preference for fluids and sweets . *Ochetellus flavipes* nesting habits are unique among Australian ants , and they construct small runways across the ground . These nests are structurally similar to nests built by some *Polyrhachis* ants , which construct platforms woven from plants that house the Hemiptera insects they attend to .

= = Behaviour and ecology = =

Workers form foraging columns in search of food . They forage into buildings , eucalyptus trees , ground areas or on low vegetation . Workers are both diurnal and nocturnal , but they are not active throughout any 24 @-@ hour period . Low activity occurs during clear sunny days ; however , colonies are extremely active shortly after rain .

Ochetellus ants are omnivores that feed primarily on arthropods , but they show a preference for fluids and sweets when they enter human houses . Workers will prey on *Ornithoptera richmondia* eggs , fruit fly pupae , *Plutella* larvae and attack wasp nests . Honeydew , nectar , Pacific reef heron feces , carrion , *Pandanus* fruits , plants , seeds , sucrose , fats and grease will also be consumed . *O. glaber* is known to exploit the extrafloral nectaries on plants without providing protection .

Foraging workers often visit *Pisonia* flowers and will feed on the nectar . Other flowers they will visit include *Canavalia* , *Commicarpus* , *Ipomoea* , *Melanthera* , *Plumbago* and *Scaevola* . *Ochetellus flavipes* regularly attends the mealybug *Prorococcus acanthodus* and protects it by building shelters . They also attend a number of butterfly larvae , including *Anthene lycaenoides* (Pale Ciliate Blue) , *Ogyris amaryllis* (Satin Azure) , *Ogyris olane* (Olane Azure) and *Ogyris oroetes* (Silky Azure) .

Predators such as other ants and the thorny devil lizard (*Moloch horridus*) predominantly feed on *Ochetellus* workers ; the number of ants that a thorny devil can consume per minute is around 24 to 45 . The total number of ants consumed in a day can be as many as 2 @,@ 500 individuals , based on an examination of the lizard 's stomach contents .

During the nuptial flight , a queen may mate with multiple males , while the males will only mate with a single queen , making them monogynous . However , *Ochetellus glaber* queens will only mate with a single male , making them polygynous . Sometimes , colonies proliferate by " budding " (also called " satelliting " or " fractionating ") , where a subset of the colony including queens , workers and brood (eggs , larvae and pupae) leave the main colony for an alternative nest site .