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Book review

STOCKAN, J.A. & ROBINSON, E.J.H. (Eds.) 2016: Wood ant ecology and conservation

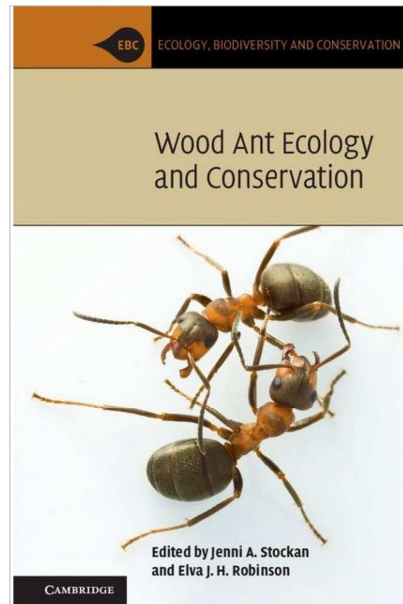
Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, XV + 304 pp.; ISBN: 9781107048331, Price: £ 59.99

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Mound building wood ants (genus *Formica* s. str.) for sure exemplify a pinnacle of social organisation and ecological impact amongst ants in the northern hemisphere. They may reach immensely large (super-)colony sizes which can only be tied together by sophisticated means of communication and nestmate recognition. Wood ants are highly important predators and provide multiple ecosystem functions. At the same time, in many parts of their distributional range, these fascinating ants are under pressure through anthropogenic influences that let their habitats deteriorate. Much research has been done, and is ongoing worldwide, on wood ants. Yet, the results tend to be published in a widely scattered range of outlets, including journals that are available to but a narrow readership. The last in-depth two-volume monograph on wood ants, published by Karl Gößwald over 25 years ago in German language, is now largely outdated.

This recent volume draws together 13 chapters provided by 23 co-authors from various biological disciplines and regions. I found this a most welcome addition to the ant literature. It makes accessible the current state of the art in wood ant research to a broad international audience. The book starts with an overview of the systematics (including an identification key, separately for the Palaearctic and Nearctic species) and distribution of wood ants. It continues with chapters on sociobiology, population genetics, ant community ecology, biotic interactions with mutualists and ant guests, and the role of mound building ants for ecosystem functioning. Some more applied chapters on aspects of conservation, monitoring and management complement this volume. All chapters give an up-to-date introduction into their topics with special focus on *Formica* ants. Each chapter has a conclusions paragraph at its end, which in some way serves as a helpful short



summary for the quick reader. A particular asset of all chapters is that they provide extensive reference to parts of the literature that are often not so easy to locate, including papers written in languages other than English or published in less "conspicuous" journals or books. Here, the specific literature is really done justice, including papers that stretch into forestry science and alike. I was also impressed by the good balance between most recent and more "classical" references in all chapters. My only criticism relates to a few figures reproduced in such a small size that it is difficult to distinguish symbols (e.g., Fig. 3.1. and Fig. 7.5). Also the contrast in some photographs reproduced as half-tone graphics in print limits the information value of these illustrations. But these are really very minor shortcomings. In summary, this book is to be recommended to any scientist with a specific interest in wood ants, be it from an academic or a more applied perspective. Personally, I will benefit a lot from this new volume for my own academic teaching.