

Paraponera clavata



Bullet ant

Scientific classification

Domain: Eukaryota
Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Arthropoda
Class: Insecta
Order: Hymenoptera
Family: Formicidae
Genus: Paraponera
Species: *P. clavata*

Binomial Name

Paraponera clavata

(Fabricius, 1775)

Paraponera clavata, commonly known as the bullet ant, is a species of ant named for its extremely painful sting. It inhabits humid lowland rainforests in Central and South America. The specific epithet of the ant, *clavata*, means "club-shaped". The generic name, *Paraponera*, translates to "near-*Ponera*". It derives from the Greek word "ponos" which means pain.

Because of its fearsome reputation, the ant has several Native American, Spanish, and Portuguese local names in different geographical areas; perhaps the best-known of these is the Venezuelan nickname *hormiga veinticuatro* (the "24 ant" or "24-hour ant"), referring to the full day of pain that follows being stung; it can also refer to the time it takes to kill a human.^{14,15}

Paraponera is predatory, and like all primitive poneromorphs, does not display polymorphism in the worker caste; the queen ant is not much larger than the workers. They are not aggressive ants but are vicious when defending the nest, when they produce a stridulating sound and sting with ferocity.¹⁶

Colonies are found in lowland areas, at elevations ranging from sea level to 750 metres (2,461 ft). However, specimens have been collected at elevations of 1,500 metres (4,921 ft) in La Amistad International Park.¹⁷

Traditions

There is an Amazonian town that performs a ritual with these ants: approximately fifty bullet ants are woven into a type of hand-made gloves, often with tree sap. To prepare this intricate glove, the ants are first put to sleep with an infusion of herbs, and then the shaman wakes them up with smoke to begin the ritual.