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Ant-associated fungi in Bulgaria

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In Europe, ant-associated fungi, both ecto- and endoparasitic, have been a subject of scientific interest for the past century, but most of the extensive studies on their taxonomy, distribution and host-parasite relations were carried out in the last decade. Although ants have developed strong anti-fungal defenses, they have also become specific hosts of several parasitic fungi most often affecting individual specimens in the colony. Recently, three species namely, *Myrmicinosporidium durum* Hölldobler, 1933, *Rickia wasmannii* Cavara, 1899 and *Laboulbenia camponoti* S. W. T. Batra, 1963 were found to infest ants in Bulgaria. After their first records in the country new data on their host range and distribution were obtained. *Strongylognathus* cf. *karawajewi* is a previously unknown ant host for endoparasitic fungus *Myrmicinosporidium durum*, while *Plagiolepis pygmaea* (Latreille, 1798) and *Pheidole pallidula* (Nylander, 1849) are new host species for Bulgaria. Additionally, these are the first records of *M. durum* for eastern Rhodopes and the central Balkan Mountains of *Laboulbenia camponoti* for the western Balkan Mountains. Considering the host utilisation by ant parasitic fungi at least four more species are expected to occur in Bulgaria.

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