



## Book Review

*A Field Guide to the Ants of New England*, by Aaron M. Ellison, Nicholas J. Gotelli, Elizabeth J. Farnsworth and Gary D. Alpert. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012. 398 pp. \$29.95.

The ants are ‘the largest proportion of animal biomass in many places’. They may turn over more soil than the earthworms and are clearly important enough to justify research and study in many terrestrial sites. This book deals with the ants of New England in the extreme North-east of the United States, including Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts and Rhode Island, which have extensive natural habitats and also many areas of exploited conifer woodland and large areas of human occupation. Figure 1.2 shows the five ecoregions of New England. At the beginning of the book, the authors give an excellent account of the basics of ant evolution, behaviour and ecology. Pages 11–27 are essential reading for anyone not very familiar with ants. The subjects covered include the effects

of nest shading and drainage, the activities of competitors and human alteration of habitats which is far less dominant a factor than in Britain. Chapter 3 gives advice and instructions on practical matters, ranging from pootering and making a collection of ants to photography.

The bulk of this book (132 pp.) is devoted to identification of the species. At the time of writing, the ants constitute 131 species in 31 genera. Not being familiar with the species of New England ants, I tried the key on the European ant *Lasius niger*, and found it easy to reach a satisfactory result. The excellent keys are profusely and beautifully illustrated with both photographs and very fine drawings by Elizabeth Farnsworth. The book is indeed, as the authors hoped, ‘as much a joy to look at as to read’. An extensive bibliography of books and technical papers and of internet resources, as well as a full index, is included.

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