

RESEARCH NOTE

**HAS THE DIVERSITY OF TROPICAL ANT FAUNA
BEEN UNDERESTIMATED? AN INDICATION
FROM LEAF LITTER STUDIES IN A WEST
MALAYSIAN LOWLAND RAIN FOREST**

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ABSTRACT

Species diversity, especially in tropical areas, has been incompletely studied. Estimations are very often not based on actual field work, and certain sampling methods can overlook or underestimate groups of species. In this brief paper, we present an indication that current ant species diversity may be underestimated or species composition skewed due to sampling that ignores leaf litter.

Key words: ants; leaf litter; species diversity; Winkler/Moczarski apparatus

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INTRODUCTION

The amount of insect diversity in the world has long been a point of debate among scientists. In a recent paper, Gaston (1990) proposed a corrected figure to Erwin's (1982; 1988) estimates of the world's number of insect species. In a response to this correction, Erwin (1991) stressed that Gaston's figures were suspect and that such estimates by experts lacking field experience were flawed from a lack of hands-on experience. This complaint could also apply to the lack of knowledge many taxonomists have on the diversity of fauna habitats and the different habitat strata available to insects. One prime example of a neglected stratum is the leaf litter found on the floor of tropical rain forests.