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Antkey: a web-based tool for the identification and study of invasive, introduced and commonly intercepted ants

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Over 15,000 species of ants have been described, and more than 200 have established populations outside of their native ranges. A small subset of these have become highly destructive invaders including five which are currently listed among the world's 100 worst invasive species. Unfortunately, detection of non-native ants is hampered by the taxonomic specialization required for accurate species identification. Antkey seeks to mitigate the spread of established introduced ants and prevent the incursion of new introductions by providing quarantine personnel, inspectors and conservation biologists with a user-friendly identification tool specifically designed for non-specialists. The Antkey taxonomic classification includes 8 subfamilies, 43 genera and 120 valid species. Features include an interactive Lucid key, dynamically generated species pages, a searchable media collection of over 1150 images, over 70 live video clips of introduced ants, a fully illustrated glossary with over 400 terms, a searchable database of introduced ant literature, over 12,000 specimen records of introduced ants imported from Antweb (www.antweb.org), and community features such as blogs, discussion forums and comment options. The interactive Lucid key allows users to start at multiple entry points, skip ambiguous or difficult characters, and keep track of the choices already made. Novice users can use the 'best' feature to determine which available characters will lead to the most parsimonious pathway. More advanced users can skip straight to subfamily or genus. The characters are illustrated with original line drawings and link to glossary definitions and additional specimen photographs. The Scratchpads platform (www.scratchpads.eu) used to build Antkey is based on the Drupal content management system. It allows users to participate in the discussion forums and post comments on nearly every page. The platform also allows multiple authors to create and edit content without using any html code.