

SOFTWARE REVIEW

Bolton's Catalogue of Ants of the World 1758-2005

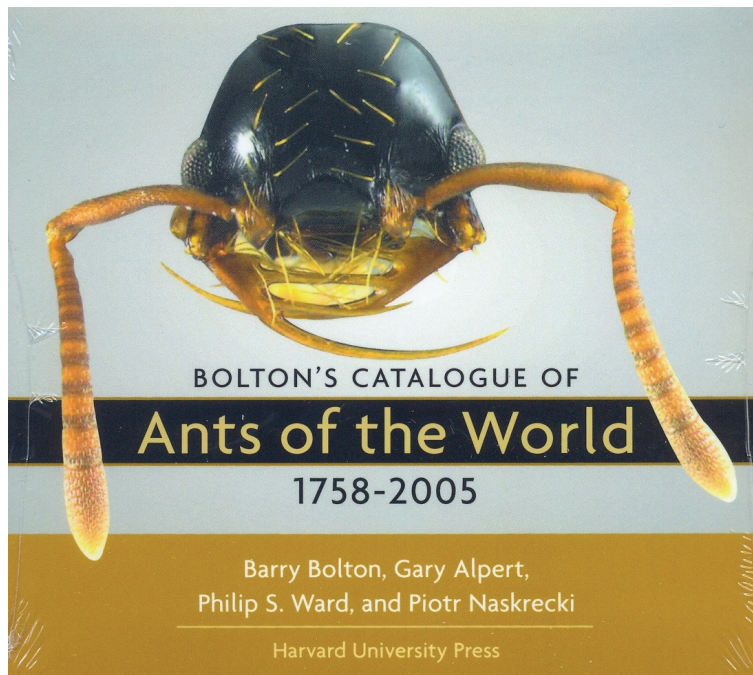
Barry Bolton, Gary Alpert, Philip S. Ward and Piotr Naskrecki (2007)

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This catalogue is an update of a catalogue published in 1995 by Bolton and therefore represents many years of work. With so much being published on ants around the world, getting a catalogue of this level of complexity together is a major achievement. The Harvard University Press website announces "*The new edition incorporates all taxonomic papers--from 1758 through 2005--on 14,550 species and subspecies of ants. The CD allows every valid species name to be linked to the primary taxonomic citation and to all subsequent taxonomic literature that is relevant.*" While this is true, the usefulness of the catalogue is somewhat limited. This is not an electronic overview of ants, nor does it provide any assistance in identifying the taxa, even representative images of the genera or species are lacking. This is a pity because the cover is illustrated with some fine photographs, taken by Gary Alpert, of the heads of some remarkable ants and one opens the software in the expectation that such fine illustrations are to be found throughout the catalogue. This is simply a comprehensive catalogue of the ant literature between 1758 and 2005 provided in a flexible electronic format. The catalogue really needs to be run from your hard disc, despite the requirement for 200mb of free space, because it runs significantly more slowly direct from the CD.

The catalogue provides indices of species names, generic names or references sorted by the first letter. The species index can be sorted by species name or by the genus level name to which each species name belongs. However, if you are looking at all the species starting with a particular letter and you press the button to resort the list so that the species are sorted by genus, you return all the species whose genera start with that letter. The reference index can be sorted by author or by year of publication. In addition, a comprehensive search facility is available to search for particular generic or species names using a range of search options, including searches by author, validity, type country, date and higher level classification and can be refined by excluding invalid or synonymised names or by limiting the search to extant or extinct taxa.

Each species page provides the original combination, type locality and current distribution as well as a list of references against which is given the taxonomic contribution made by each reference. You can then access any of the listed references directly simply by clicking on the reference. The page for that reference is then displayed. This not only provides the complete reference (although it would have been desirable to have the journal names given in full rather than in abbreviated form), but it also lists other species treated in that work. Similarly, all of these names provide live links to the pages covering those species.



One particular irritation is that there isn't a back button allowing backtracking if you press the wrong button or want to check something else from the previous screen. For example, if you have moved from a species page to a reference page to get full details of that reference and wish to return to the species page, the only option is to press the HOME button and re-find the species page from the start again. There is a link called "Last found" but this doesn't backtrack. In fact, pressing this button presents the results of your previous search which may be completely irrelevant to your current search. Of course, having pressed "Last found" in the hope that it is a backtrack button and finding yourself back in your previous search, it is not possible to return to where you were without starting again from the home page.

When you have a taxon page displayed, a green "P" appears beside one reference in the list provided. The meaning of this is not immediately apparent and it would have been useful to have provided a glossary accessible from within the page. It is presumed that the P indicates the primary reference for the taxon. When a reference page is displayed, a series of Ps appear against several of the taxa, presumably indicating the species for which this page is the primary reference – but this is only a guess. The absence of a P when the page features an unavailable name is consistent with this explanation.

Similarly, a cross appears next to some names in the taxon lists and, again, no explanation is available from the catalogue screens. However, the top menu bar provides a Help button. Pressing this takes you to a labelled copy of the interface screen which provides an explanation of the features of the screen. This screen is also accessible via a button labelled "Interface help" provided on the home page. Here we find that the cross indicates fossil taxa and taxon names appear in different colours to differentiate between valid names (black), junior synonyms (blue) and unavailable names (brown). There is still no explanation provided for the green "P".

A button at the bottom of the screen is labelled BROWSE but doesn't do anything.

In summary, an extremely valuable item for anybody needing convenient access to the wealth of literature published on ants or those needing to check the current status of particular ant names. A copy of this catalogue should reside in all reference libraries although I can't see a major market for entomologists generally.

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