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Rhysacephala novacaledonica sp. nov. (Hymenoptera: Xiphydriidae), the first xiphydriid woodwasp from New Caledonia

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ABSTRACT

Xiphydriid woodwasps have been very rarely collected in Australasia although they are widely distributed in the region. Species have been described from the Aru, Ambon and Buru Islands, Indonesia, eastern mainland Australia, Papua New Guinea, and New Zealand. Here *Rhysacephala novacaledonica* Jennings & Austin, sp. nov., is described, which is the first record of a xiphydriid woodwasp from New Caledonia. In addition, a key to genera for the region is presented, along with a discussion of the biology and distribution of the group in Australasia.

Key words: Xiphydrioidea, taxonomy, Symphyta

INTRODUCTION

The sawfly family Xiphydriidae (Xiphydrioidea), or woodwasps, is worldwide in distribution, except Africa, and includes some 119 described species (Taeger & Blank 2006). Xiphydriids are rarely collected in Australasia and poorly represented in collections, with only nine described species in two subfamilies, Derecyrtinae and Xiphydriinae (Benson 1954). Derecyrtinae are restricted to Central and South America except for the monotypic genus *Austrocyrta* Riek, 1955 from Australia (Riek 1955; Smith 1978). Xiphydriinae occur worldwide (Maa 1949; Smith 1978) and, in Australasia, are known from eight described species; *Cingalixiphia laeviceps* (F. Smith, 1861) from Ambyona [Ambon] and Buru, Indonesia, *Rhysacephala leai* (Forsius, 1927), *R. obtusiventris* (Rohwer, 1918) and *R. wilsoni* Benson, 1954 from Australia, *R. rufipes* (F. Smith, 1859) from the Aru Islands, Indonesia, *R. testacea* (Mocsáry, 1900) from Papua New Guinea, and *Moaxiphia decepta* (F. Smith, 1876) and *M. duniana* (Gourlay, 1927) from New Zealand (Smith 1978) (Fig. 1). There are also perhaps a dozen or more undescribed species of *Rhysacephala* Benson, 1954 known from the Australasian region, including a number from the east coast of mainland Australia, Tasmania, Lord Howe Island (authors unpubl.) and New Caledonia (Smith pers. comm.).

All known xiphydriid larvae are woodborers and have only vestigial legs (Smith & Middlekauff 1987). In the Northern Hemisphere, larvae are known to develop in the wood of angiosperms, usually in small branches of deciduous trees such as Aceraceae, Betulaceae, Salicaceae, and Ulmaceae (Smith 1976; Smith 1978; Gauld & Bolton 1996; Smith & Schiff 2001), where they depend on symbiotic fungi in their tunnels for food for the developing larvae (e.g. Kajimura 2000). Very little is known about the biology of Australasian xiphydriids. In New Zealand, the larvae of *M. decepta* bore in twigs of the evergreen shrub *Coprosma robusta* Raoul. (Rubiaceae), and the larvae of *M. duniana* tunnel in twigs of the evergreen southern beeches *Nothofagus fusca* (Hook.f.) Oerst. and *N. menziesii* (Hook.f.) Oerst. (Fagaceae) (Valentine & Walker 1991). Basset (1991) noted that *Rhysacephala* were found in the canopy of an *Argyrodendron actinophyllum* Edlin (Malvaceae, Sterculieae) forest near Brisbane, Australia, although it is not clear that it is the host.

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