



Species profile

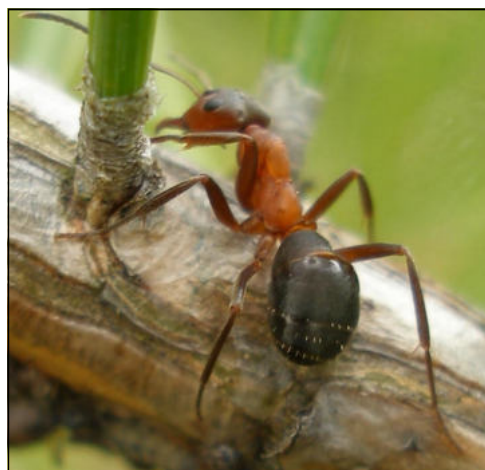
Narrow-Headed Ant

The Narrow-headed ant (*Formica exsecta*) is a rare wood ant found only in the Scottish Highlands and one remaining site in England. It is listed as 'endangered' in the UK Red Data Book. Read more about this wonderful insect.

Ants belong to the group Hymenoptera which is a large insect group including bees and wasps.

Narrow-headed ants live in a domed shaped nest, about half the size of a football. The nest often provides a habitat for other invertebrates. The worker ants are 6-8cm long and they sometimes use the common black ant (*Formica lasius*) as servants!

The Narrow-headed ant is an important indicator of a healthy woodland. It also performs important jobs in the wood such as distributing the seeds of many plants and preying on a range of other invertebrates which feed on plants, such as aphids and caterpillars.



Narrow-headed ant (*Formica exsecta*)
© Gus Jones

This ant used to be more widespread in southern England but is now limited to a heathland site in Devon. Its core population is now found in the ancient Caledonian pine forests of Speyside, with small outlying colonies in Deeside and Perthshire. Its decline is thought to be the result of a combination of factors:

- Loss of habitat - lowland heathland
- Disturbance through human activities such as dirt-biking and pony grazing
- Commercial forestry, which destroys the natural habitat structure. The trees are planted very thickly which makes it very dark on the floor of the wood. The ants depend on warm sunshine to raise the temperature of their nest which is important for the development of the young.
- Fragmentation of woodland habitats - Narrow-headed ants are unable to cross areas of hostile habitat and so can rarely colonise new, suitable habitat.



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Action is now being taken to help and protect the Narrow-headed ant. Two important areas are receiving protection and foresters are helping to protect populations of the ant by how they manage the wood.

A wildlife conservation organisation has campaigned successfully for the better protection of this ant over the last decade. They provide information and advice to landowners with these ants on their land.

It is hoped that conservation and improved understanding of the ant's needs, will ensure the Narrow-headed ant's survival.



Narrow-headed ant (*Formica exsecta*) © April Nobile