

# Antillean Termite Named for a Locality in Central America: Taxonomic Memorial to a Perpetuated Error

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**ABSTRACT** The syntype series of the Antillean termite *Nasutitermes acajutlae* (Holmgren) (Isoptera: Termitidae; Nasutitermitinae) is reexamined. We discovered that one of the specimens, collected from Acajutla, San Salvador, did not come from the island of San Salvador in the Bahamas, as had been assumed since its description in 1910. Instead, it was collected from a locality near the capital of the Central American country of El Salvador. That specimen can now be identified as *N. nigriceps* (Haldeman). We designate the soldier from the St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, syntype series as the lectotype of the species *N. acajutlae*.

**KEY WORDS** *Nasutitermes acajutlae*, *Nasutitermes nigriceps*, Isoptera, Termitidae, Nasutitermitinae

FOLLOWING PUBLICATION OF our article on the taxonomy and biogeography of the Neotropical termites *Nasutitermes acajutlae* (Holmgren) and *N. nigriceps* (Haldeman) (Thorne et al. 1994), we received letters from 2 colleagues who independently noticed a potential problem with the nomenclature of *N. acajutlae*. Our article stated that *N. acajutlae* was described originally (as *Eutermes*) by Holmgren (1910) based on specimens from Acajutla, San Salvador, Bahamas (alate), and from St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands (1 soldier, 1 worker, and 1 alate). Both sets of specimens are labeled as COTYPES (now termed syntypes) and reside in the collection of the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH). We presented evidence that Snyder's (1949) synonymy of *N. acajutlae* with *N. nigriceps* was not justified. We resurrected the name *N. acajutlae* (Holmgren) for the species occurring in the Antilles from Puerto Rico east and south to Trinidad (not recorded from all intervening islands) into Guyana and possibly into other locations in South America.

This distribution did not include the Bahamas, and thus the San Salvador syntype of *N. acajutlae* was left dangling. As our correspondents noted, if the San Salvador alate specimen was not *N. acajutlae*, then we should at a minimum designate the St. Thomas soldier as the lectotype, awkward as that might be given that the species name was derived from a different locality. The possibility existed that 2 species were involved. Selection of the San Salvador alate as lectotype thus had the po-

tential to invalidate our use of the name and the Virgin Islands species would require a different name.

We were aware of those potential problems, but we had elected to postpone decisive action because Holmgren's specimen from San Salvador was perplexing to us, and we had not resolved its identity to our satisfaction. Banks (1919) commented that Holmgren's San Salvador alate is probably *N. rippertii* (Rambur) (a species known from the Bahamas; originally described by Rambur [1842] and redescribed by Silvestri [1903]). Emerson (1925) continued to list San Salvador as a type locality and as part of the range of *N. acajutlae*. We compared and noted clear distinctions between Holmgren's single alate specimen from San Salvador and the *N. rippertii* "homotype male close to type female" (as determined by N. Banks and compared by A. Emerson [1957]) (Cienfuegos, Cuba; AMNH collection). Holmgren's alate from San Salvador does fit within the *N. acajutlae*/*N. nigriceps* complex (we have not identified alate characters that discriminate between the 2 species). However, neither species has ever been reported from the Bahamas in a published record or in any museum collection that we examined. Furthermore, the Bahamian location was inconsistent with the biogeographic pattern that reflected species distributions that were otherwise consistent with the historical geography of the region (Thorne et al. 1994). The conservative approach to indecision seemed to be inaction. However, primed by the 2 letters we focused on the problem yet again. This time we have resolved it with decisive and surprising results.

Holmgren's (1910, pp. 262–263) original description lists the type material and locations as follows: "Fundort. (locality) San Salvador: Acaju-

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tla—Mus. Hamburg. St. Thomas—WASSMANNs Sammlung (collection).” There is no mention of the number of specimens or castes. From that point on, nearly all reports assume that Acajutla, San Salvador referred to the island of San Salvador in the Bahamas (Emerson 1925; Snyder 1949, 1956). Banks (1919, p. 484) appears to be the single exception. He comments, “(Holmgren’s) adult from Central America is different, and different from what I consider the adult of *N. creolina*. The adult *E. acajutlae* of Holmgren from San Salvador is extremely close to and probably identical with the *E. rippertii*.”

Banks’ reference to Central America seemed odd because *N. rippertii* has been found only from the Bahamas, Cuba, and Jamaica (Snyder 1949, Araujo 1977). Nevertheless, his casual comment regarding locality spurred us to track the location of Acajutla more aggressively. At that time we had tried to locate Acajutla on the island of San Salvador, but we failed to find the location. We dismissed that as a frequent idiosyncrasy of collection records: a small town may not persist or collectors may list a relatively ephemeral campsite or a colloquial name for a locality. We had not been too concerned because the island of San Salvador is small; issues such as altitude and exact location were not important.

Upon launching a broader search for Acajutla, our suspicions after reading Banks were confirmed, and this unexpected breakthrough finally resolved the puzzle. Acajutla is a small town nestled on the edge of San Salvador, the capital city of the country of El Salvador in Central America. El Salvador was founded as an independent country in 1840. Holmgren never listed the country in which his specimen was collected (possibly sent to him by some 3rd party), and no other authors ever identified El Salvador as a type location or in distribution lists. In fact, Holmgren’s alate from Acajutla, El Salvador, is probably *N. nigriceps*, the close relative of *N. acajutlae*. Alates of these 2 species are at this point indistinguishable. *N. nigriceps* was described by Haldeman (1853) from a specimen collected in western Mexico.

We are now confident that the syntype series of *N. acajutlae* includes 2 species. Here we designate the soldier from Holmgren’s St. Thomas syntype series as the lectotype of *Nasutitermes acajutlae*,

and we exclude the San Salvador specimen from the paralectotype series. Thus, concludes the saga of why a numerically and ecologically conspicuous termite in the eastern Caribbean is named for a locality on the Pacific Coast of Central America.

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