

New records of social wasps in the state of Paraíba, Brazil

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Abstract: The state of Paraíba is included in the semi-arid region of Northeastern Brazil, called Caatinga, and this region is characterized by low and irregular rainfall, with xerophilous vegetation. Social wasps are an important ecological group, which has been utilized for biological control and as bioindicators of environmental quality. Few studies about the diversity of social wasps were accomplished in the Caatinga and there is no survey of social wasps in the state of Paraíba. This study used data collected from city of Sumé, through field research and analysis of previously deposited material from surveys realized by Brazilian Corporation of Agricultural Research (EMBRAPA). Two species of social wasps, *Polistes simillimus* and *Mischocyttarus cearensis*, were recorded for the first time in state of Paraíba.

Key words: Polistinae, Caatinga, Northeastern Brazil

The Caatinga is a typical biome of Northeastern Brazil, covering 844,000 km² (IBGE 2014) (Figure 1). This biome is characterized by low irregular rainfall, and the occurrence of severe droughts is common. However, this important biome of Brazil deserves more studies regarding its biodiversity (Andena and Carpenter, 2014). Few studies about diversity of social wasps were carried out in Caatinga, and most of these studies were about floral visitors in the state of Bahia (Santos et al. 2006; Aguiar and Santos 2007; Santos et al. 2007). Nevertheless, there are no records of Polistinae species in the state of Paraíba.

Polistinae is a subfamily of Vespidae, with 29 genera and more than 900 species (Richards 1971, 1978; Carpenter et al. 1996). This group is composed by social wasps that present eusocial behavior, and may show swarm

founding behavior (Jeanne 1991). According to Carpenter and Marques (2001), in Brazil there are records of social wasps from three tribes: Epiponini, Polistini and Mischocyttarini. Polistini is widely distributed in tropical and subtropical areas (Richards 1978).

Here, we report two new records of social wasps species in the state of Paraíba, collected using attractive traps and active search in two fragments of Caatinga, both surrounded by crops (cotton, corn and bean) in the municipality of Sumé (07°40'18" S, 036°52'54" W) (Figure 1). Additionally, we analyzed specimens that were deposited in EMBRAPA COTTON (Brazilian Corporation of Agricultural Research, Cotton Unit).

Two species from Polistinae were found and are reported in this study (Figure 2). One of them belongs to the Polistini tribe that presents the single genus *Polistes*. This is a cosmopolitan genus with more than 200 species, with 38 species reported in Brazil and of them, 10 are considered endemic (Carpenter and Marques 2001). The first recorded species is *Polistes simillimus* Zikán, 1951, a well-studied species, in regard of its behavior

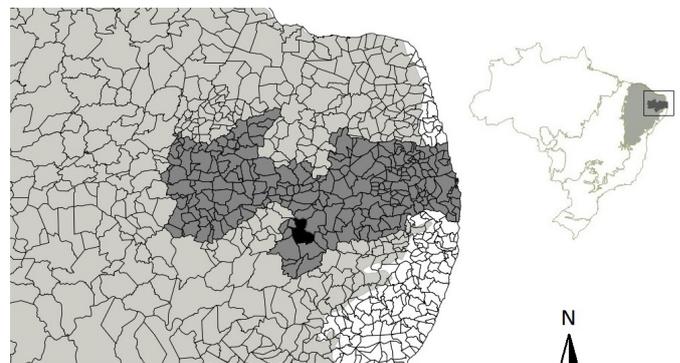


Figure 1. Map of Brazil, highlighting the biome Caatinga that covers almost 10% of the territory. Spotlight to the state of Paraíba and the municipality of Sumé, where social wasps were collected in this study.

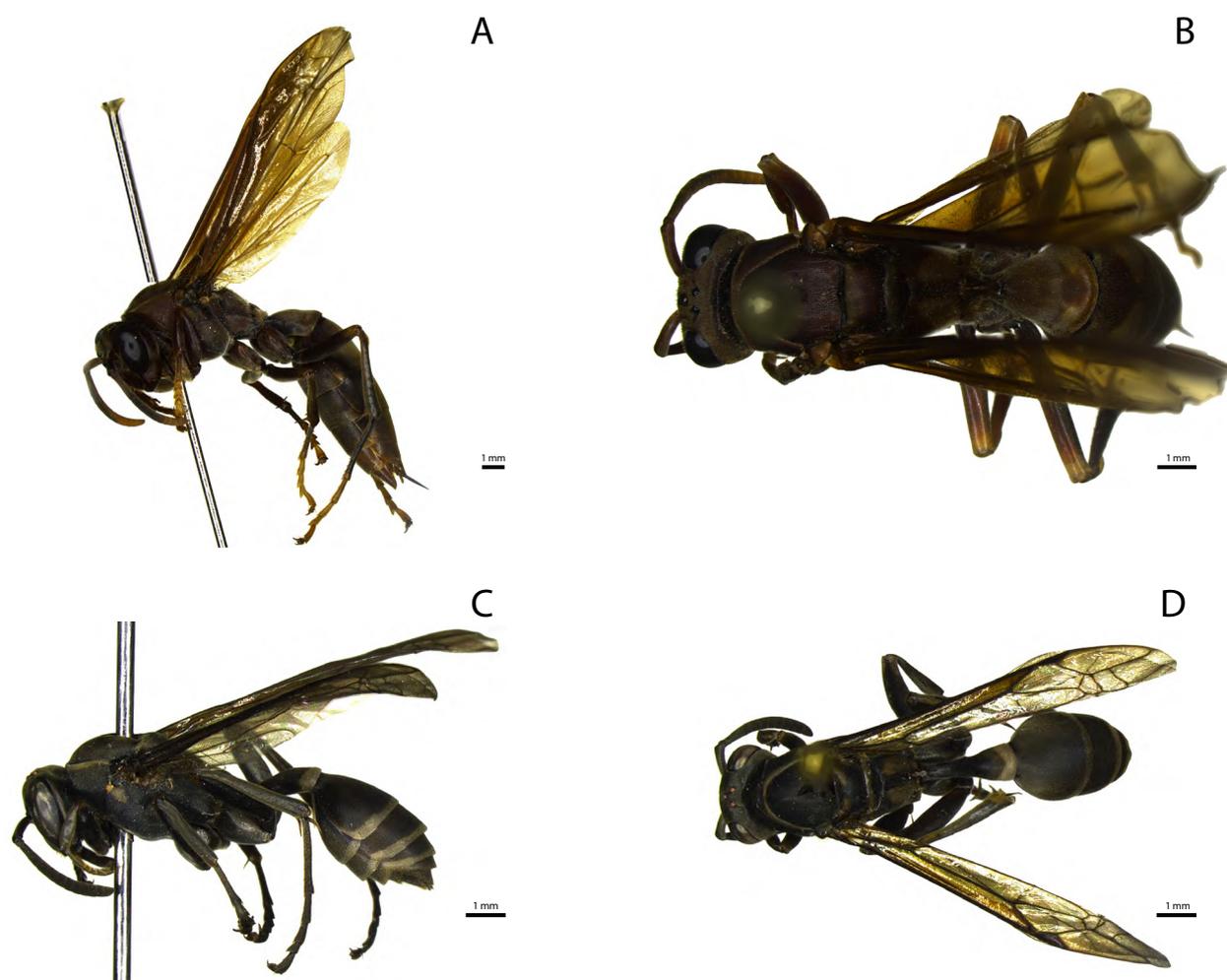


Figure 2. **A:** Lateral view of individual of *Polistes simillimus*. **B:** Dorsal view of individual of *P. simillimus*. **C:** lateral view of individual of *Mischocyttarus cearensis*. **D:** Dorsal view of individual of *M. cearensis*.

and natural history (Giannotti 1994; Prezoto et al. 1994; Prezoto and Machado 1999; Elisei et al. 2008). This species is very common in eastern Brazil, occurring from South Bahia to Rio Grande do Sul states, but had never been found in Paraíba state (see Andena and Carpenter 2014).

Mischocyttarini tribe also presents a single genus, *Mischocyttarus* that comprises 245 species, widely distributed from Argentina to the southeastern of USA (Carpenter and Marques 2001; Silveiras 2008). In Brazil, 132 species are known, including 74 considered as endemic (Richards 1978). *Mischocyttarus cearensis* Richards, 1945, represents the first record for this genus for Paraíba state according to Andena and Carpenter (2014).

The biodiversity of Northeastern Brazil is still largely unknown and deserves more studies as shown by the discovery of these two records. Andena and Carpenter (2014) reported only nine species of social wasps for the semiarid region of the Paraíba. Guérnard *et al.* (2012) exposed the importance of studies in areas with unknown diversity and high deforestation, as the Caatinga, identified by these authors as a “hotspot of discovery”.

Therefore, the increase in the number of species observed can reveal that the Caatinga is not a place with low diversity of social wasps, but that it is just a poorly studied biome.

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