

A "one-stop shop" for wasp identity information

August 20 2015, by Jan Suszkiw



ARS helped compile a new interactive, image-based online resource to identify wasps in superfamily Cynipoidea, which includes many of the parasitoid wasps. Credit: Matt Buffington

Determining the identity of parasitic wasps—some measuring less than a millimeter long—can be a time-consuming process that includes comparing their features to descriptions in published works and disparate specimen collections. Now, the same task could begin with the click of a mouse, thanks to an international team of researchers, including one from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The team has [published](#) a new online document that consolidates the latest information on the wasp superfamily Cynipoidea. The monograph uses pairs of interactive, image-based identification keys—including those of wing shape, body segmentation and other characteristics—to help users navigate to the correct genus or species of the wasp of interest, along with available biological, geographic and other information about the insect, including locations of existing specimens.

Cynipoid wasps are critical components of natural and agricultural ecosystems, attacking the larval stages of pest flies, such as leaf-mining flies and [fruit flies](#), according to Matt Buffington, a team member and entomologist at the USDA Agricultural Research Service's (ARS) Systematic Entomology Laboratory in Washington, DC.

The monograph focuses on species from the Afrotropical Region, an area encompassing all of Africa south of the Sahara Desert as well as the southern Arabian Peninsula, Madagascar and surrounding islands. The [monograph](#) will not only make it easier to identify and categorize new species as they're discovered, but it will also broaden scientific understanding of their taxonomic associations and biological diversity. This could prove especially important in identifying [wasp species](#) that have potential as biological control agents, such as those that parasitize crop-damaging flies.

Provided by Agricultural Research Service

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