

# New species of ant found pottering under the Pilbara named after Voldemort

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Workers of *Leptanilla voldemort* sp. nov. from Western Australia in ethanol.  
Credit: *ZooKeys* (2024). DOI: 10.3897/zookeys.1197.114072

A study by The University of Western Australia has unearthed a new species of subterranean ant that shares some traits with a well-known Harry Potter villain.

The research, [published](#) in *Zookeys*, describes the new species *Leptanilla voldemort* as a pale ant with a slender build, spindly legs, and long, sharp mandibles.

Lead researcher Dr. Mark Wong, a Forrest Fellow from UWA's School of Biological Sciences, said its name (*L. voldemort* for short) paid homage to the dark wizard Lord Voldemort in the Harry Potter series.

"The fearsome antagonists in Harry Potter and the Ant both have a ghostly and slender appearance and live in the shadows," Dr. Wong said.

The ant was discovered in an ecological survey that documented animals living below ground in the arid Pilbara region in the north of Western Australia.

"Only two specimens of the new ant species were found, and both were collected in a net lowered down a 25-meter drill hole and retrieved by scraping against the hole's inner surface," he said.

There are more than 14,000 species of ants worldwide, but only about 60 of these belong to the genus *Leptanilla*.

"Unlike most ants, species of *Leptanilla* live in small colonies, usually comprising a queen and only a hundred or so workers, and nest and forage exclusively underground," Dr. Wong said.

"Adapting to life in darkness, *Leptanilla* workers are blind, devoid of pigmentation, and measure between just one to two millimeters—not much larger than a grain of sand—allowing them to move effortlessly through the soil."

Australia has one of the highest levels of ant diversity in the world—estimates range from 1,300 to more than 5,000 species—but *L.*

voldemort is only the second *Leptanilla* species discovered on the continent.

"From what we know from the few observations of other *Leptanilla* species and the highly specialized, sharp mandibles of *L. Voldemort*, this new species is almost surely a predator, a fearsome hunter in the dark," Dr. Wong said.

"While the exact prey of *L. voldemort* remains unclear, other *Leptanilla* [species](#) are known to use their sharp jaws and powerful stings to immobilize soil-dwelling centipedes much larger than themselves, before carrying their larvae over to feed on the carcass."

**More information:** Mark K. L. Wong et al, *Leptanilla voldemort* sp. nov., a gracile new species of the hypogaecic ant genus *Leptanilla* (Hymenoptera, Formicidae) from the Pilbara, with a key to Australian *Leptanilla*, *ZooKeys* (2024). [DOI: 10.3897/zookeys.1197.114072](https://doi.org/10.3897/zookeys.1197.114072)

Provided by University of Western Australia

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