

Red Wood Ants in Romania - distribution, monitoring and conservation issues

Thursday, 12 March 2026 14:10 (20 minutes)

Red Wood ants (the *Formica rufa* group) are a complex of ant species native to the coniferous, deciduous and mixed forests of Europe. Widely recognized as ecosystem engineers, they construct large, dome-shaped mounds from spruce needles, twigs, and grass, which function as sophisticated solar collectors and climate-controlled nurseries. These ants play a critical keystone role in forest ecology through their aggressive predation of invertebrates, their mutualistic tending of aphids for honeydew, and their role in nutrient cycling and seed dispersal. In Europe, there are seven known red wood ant species: *Formica rufa*, *Formica polyctena*, *Formica lugubris*, *Formica aquilonia*, *Formica pratensis*, *Formica paralugubris* and *Formica truncorum*. In Romania, four of these species occur and their distribution is discussed. Aspects regarding the conservation and monitoring protocol are also highlighted.

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Session Classification: Coastal & Environmental Security in a Warming Europe

Track Classification: General sessions: Coastal & Environmental Security in a Warming Europe