

Erroneous record of the mud-dauber wasp, *Sceliphron laetum* (Hymenoptera : Sphecidae), in New Zealand

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Abstract

The mud-dauber wasp, *Sceliphron laetum* (F. Smith), was erroneously recorded from New Zealand. It does not occur there.

Keywords: Hymenoptera, Sphecidae, *Sceliphron laetum*, absence in New Zealand.

Mud-dauber wasps of the genus *Sceliphron* belong to the family Sphecidae and tribe Sceliphhrini (*olim* Sceliphronini). They are a cosmopolitan group, with a long petiole and the body and legs typically black and yellow. Several species have become widely established through the activities of man in continental areas and islands. In reviewing the New Zealand Sphecidae and discussing the high-pitched buzzing made by *Pison spinolae* Shuckard in nest-building, attention was drawn to the absence of mud-dauber wasps (*Sceliphron*) in New Zealand (Callan 1979).

Sceliphron (*Sceliphron*) *laetum* (F. Smith) is an Australian wasp, up to 30 mm long, which builds multicellular mud nests in sheltered situations, often near human habitations, and provisions the cells with spiders. Smith (1979) discussed its population

dynamics. It occurs widely in Australia, and ranges to Indonesia (Celebes), New Guinea, New Caledonia, and Solomon Islands, and has become more recently established in Guam and Caroline Islands.

Bohart and Menke (1976) included New Zealand incorrectly in their species checklist for the distribution of *S. laetum*. This record was presumably taken from Kohl (1918), who listed New Zealand, but doubted himself whether it actually occurred there. Kohl remarked "Es scheint dem Verfasser fraglich zu sein, ob diese Art in Neuseeland wirklich einheimisch oder ob sie nur vorübergehend mit Schiffen eingeschleppt ist." Van der Vecht and van Breugel (1968) do not record *S. laetum* from New Zealand.

The mud-dauber wasp *S. laetum* does not occur in New Zealand, and it seems unlikely that so large and conspicuous a species, which commonly builds its nests near houses, could be overlooked. However, it is a potential immigrant. In New Caledonia three adventitious species of *Sceliphron*, one of them *S. laetum*, are established. Should this species gain a foothold in New Zealand, it would no doubt be found first in the northern part of Northland, and would not remain unnoticed long. If it became established, this wasp would fill an otherwise unoccupied niche, where it might compete with *Pison spinolae* for nesting sites, but probably not for prey. Both wasps store spiders, but, so far as known, of different families — *S. laetum* preying on Araneidae and *P. spinolae* on Argiopidae. These two species, both builders of mud nests, co-exist amicably in the garage of my house in Canberra, Australian Capital Territory.

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