



«Actions to protect, conserve and promote biodiversity. Field studies of endemic, endangered and nationally important species of Greece». Funded by the Natural Environment and Climate Change Agency (NECCA)

TITLE

Study of the endemic army ant species *Aenictus rhodiensis* (Hymenoptera: Formicidae) in southeast Europe

(Project ID: 13685)

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ABSTRACT

The importance of ants in ecosystems has many times been reflected in a number of scientific works. Greece has the largest number of ant species per country size in all of Europe, as well as the largest number of endemic species. The only endemic species of army ant in Greece (but also in Europe) *Aenictus rhodiensis* has only been identified in Rhodes and Samos. Reproductive males or females of the species have never been described – only workers. This research aims to identify such forms (castes) as well as to better depict the range of the species on islands where it is probably present. The core team, with the help of a network of students through the Dodecanese Primary Education Directorate as citizen scientists, will visit the islands of the Dodecanese (Rhodes, Chalki, Symi, Tilos, Nisyros, Kos and Kalymnos) and with appropriate field techniques will collect and record the biogeography, ecology and morphology of the species. Collected specimens will be deposited at the Museum of Zoology of the NKUA, together with other arthropod species that make up the faunal community of *Aenictus rhodiensis*. Additionally, groups of young students will learn about ant biology, basic field techniques, and experience participating in a science program. The knowledge gained about the target species will be used as a study object for highly specialized and cryptic species and how they perceive changes in ecosystems and climate.
