



First report of small hive beetles (*Aethina tumida*) infesting honey bees, *Apis cerana* and *Apis mellifera* colonies in Thailand

Alexis L. Beaurepaire, Lars Straub, Sanchai Naree, Jakkrawut Maitip, Steven Cook, Yanping Chen, Peter Neumann, Gareth S. Powell, James D. Ellis, Jay D. Evans & Guntima Suwannapong

To cite this article: Alexis L. Beaurepaire, Lars Straub, Sanchai Naree, Jakkrawut Maitip, Steven Cook, Yanping Chen, Peter Neumann, Gareth S. Powell, James D. Ellis, Jay D. Evans & Guntima Suwannapong (2026) First report of small hive beetles (*Aethina tumida*) infesting honey bees, *Apis cerana* and *Apis mellifera* colonies in Thailand, Journal of Apicultural Research, 65:4, 619-622, DOI: [10.1080/00218839.2026.2649510](https://doi.org/10.1080/00218839.2026.2649510)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00218839.2026.2649510>



© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 15 Apr 2026.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 505



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



NOTES AND COMMENTS



First report of small hive beetles (*Aethina tumida*) infesting honey bees, *Apis cerana* and *Apis mellifera* colonies in Thailand

Alexis L. Beaupaire^{a,b} , Lars Straub^{b,d} , Sanchai Naree^c , Jakkrawut Maitip^d , Steven Cook^e , Yanping Chen^e , Peter Neumann^b , Gareth S. Powell^f , James D. Ellis^g , Jay D. Evans^e and Guntima Suwannapong^h

^aSwiss Bee Research Centre, Agroscope Liebefeld, Switzerland; ^bInstitute of Bee Health, University of Bern, Switzerland; ^cPharmacology and Biopharmaceutical Department, Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Burapha University, Thailand; ^dFaculty of Science, Energy and Environment, King Mongkut's University of Technology North Bangkok, Thailand, Rayong; ^eUnited States Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Services, Bee Research Laboratory, Beltsville, Maryland, USA; ^fNorth Carolina State University Insect Museum, Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, North Carolina, USA; ^gEntomology and Nematology Department, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, USA; ^hDepartment of Biology, Faculty of Science, Burapha University, Thailand

ABSTRACT

Small hive beetles (SHBs), *Aethina tumida*, are parasites of social bee colonies endemic to sub-Saharan Africa and have become a widespread invasive species. SHBs have recently established populations in different regions of Asia, infesting both western (*Apis mellifera*) and eastern honey bees (*Apis cerana*) colonies. Here, we report for the first time on SHBs in Thailand. Suspicious adult beetles were collected for morphological and genetic analyses to confirm taxonomy and track the origin of this potential new invasion. Both morphometrics and genetics confirmed that the collected adults were *A. tumida*. The sequenced mtDNA haplotypes match those of SHB specimens from Hawaii and South Africa, but not those from neighbouring Asian countries that have previously been invaded. These results suggest that the invasion originated from a single source and that the pest was transported over long distances, rather than coming from neighbouring countries.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 16 September 2025
Accepted 17 February 2026

KEYWORDS

Barcoding; invasive species; morphometrics; phylogeography; small hive beetle

Small hive beetles (SHBs), *Aethina tumida*, are pests of social bee colonies (Neumann & Elzen, 2004). They originate from sub-Saharan Africa but have become a worldwide invasive species (Idrissou et al., 2019). Over the past decade, SHBs have established populations in Asia, including the Philippines (Cervancia et al., 2016), South Korea (Namin et al., 2019), and China (Liu et al., 2021), where this pest was also found in *Apis cerana* colonies. The beetle's ability to invade Asian honey bee colonies is of great concern (Chantawannakul et al., 2016).

In October 2023, beetles resembling *A. tumida* were observed by beekeepers in Eastern Thailand, in the provinces Chantaburi and Chon Buri. Mass reproduction in absconded *Apis cerana* colonies was observed in the infested apiaries. Twenty samples of beetles were collected from each two colonies of *A. mellifera* located in Bang Saen, Chon Buri Province (13°16'47.9"N, 100°55'29.0" E) and Rayong Province (13°01'34.0"N, 101°21'49.6"E), and 30 beetles from one colony of *A. cerana* located in Bang Saen (13°16'47.9"N, 100°55'29.0" E) and taken to the

laboratory for species identification using morphological and genetic analyses (barcoding) (R Core Team, 2016). The general morphology and size of the collected specimens were analyzed. To do so, the ultra-structure of an SHB male from an *A. mellifera* colony located in Bang Saen was studied using a scanning electron microscope (LEO, LEO 1450 VP) following the procedure described by Suwannapong et al. (2011). Genetic analyses, including DNA extraction and sequencing of a portion of the mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) Cytochrome Oxidase I (COI) gene of 14 adult specimens collected in Thailand (i.e., 12 in the *A. mellifera* colony of Bang Saen and two in Chantaburi) were conducted following standard methods as described in Liu et al. (2021). In brief, DNA was extracted using a NucleoSpin[®] Tissue Kit (Macherey-Nagel) and PCR was performed using the AT1904S and AT2953A primers from Evans et al. (2000). The PCR products were sent to Microsynth (Switzerland) for sequencing using the AT1904S primer. Sequences were trimmed using the software Chromas v. 2.6.6 (Technelysium, 2000n.d.). Sequences were then aligned using the ClustalW

CONTACT Guntima Suwannapong guntima@go.buu.ac.th; guntima@buu.ac.th; beefambuu@gmail.com

© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

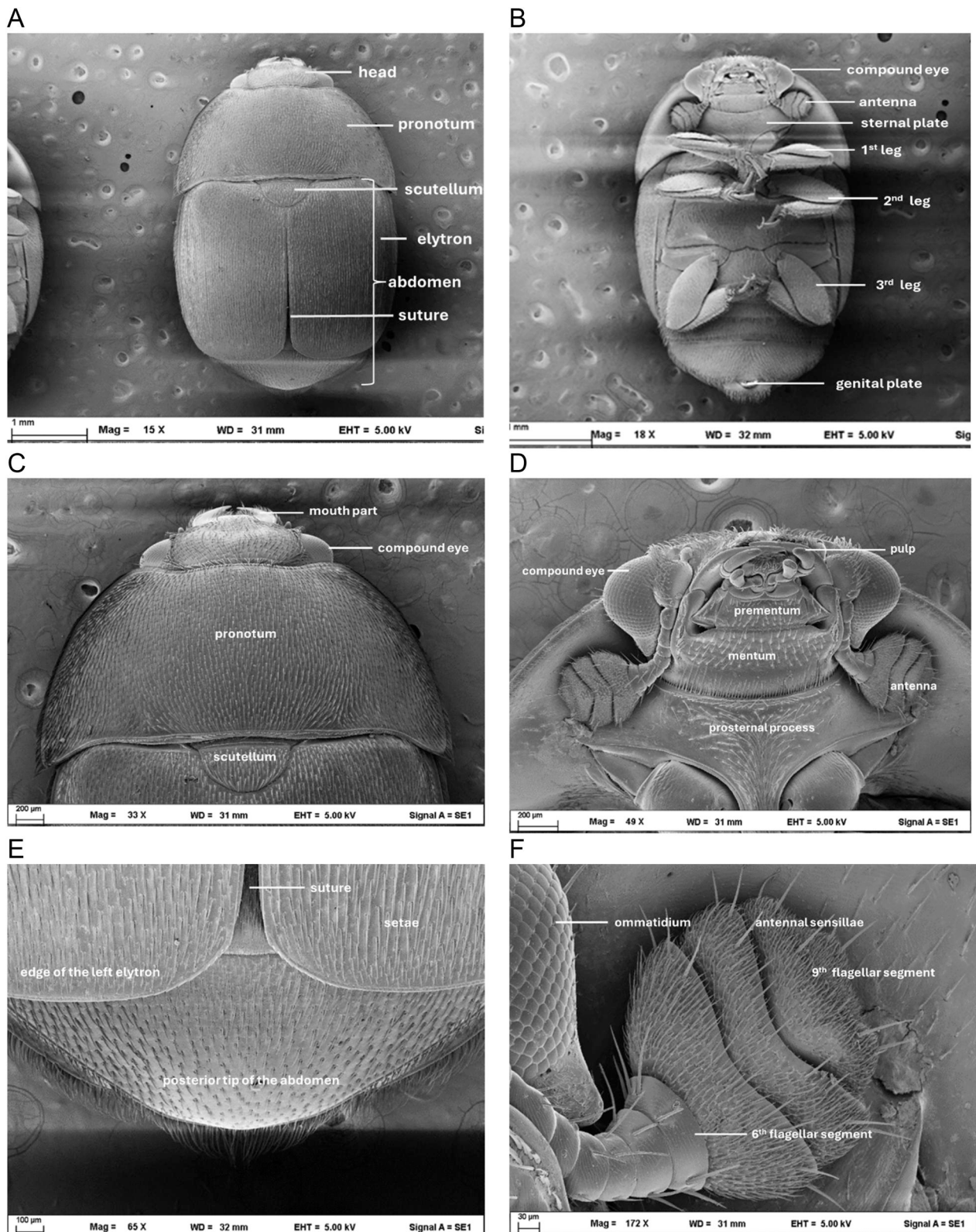


Figure 1. Scanning electron micrographs of *Aethina tumida*.

Adult male SHB collected in a *Apis mellifera* colony in Bang Saen. Dorsal view of (A); ventral view (B); dorsal view of the head and upper thoracic region (C); ventral view of the head and upper thoracic region (D); dorsal view of the posterior tip of the abdomen which covered partially by elytra (E); clubbed antenna of *A. tumida* showing three enlarged distal segments (F).

method, and a Maximum Likelihood phylogenetic tree was constructed using MEGA v. 12 (Kumar et al., 2024). The SHB sequences were then BLASTed against the NCBI database (<https://blast.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/Blast.cgi>) to identify the closest known haplotypes. Additional published sequences from previous studies

(Duquesne et al., 2017; Granato et al., 2017; Idrissou et al., 2019), including specimens collected in the native and invasive ranges of SHBs, were obtained from the NCBI database and added to the analysis. Notably, sequences from China (Liu et al., 2021) were also included in order to test whether the

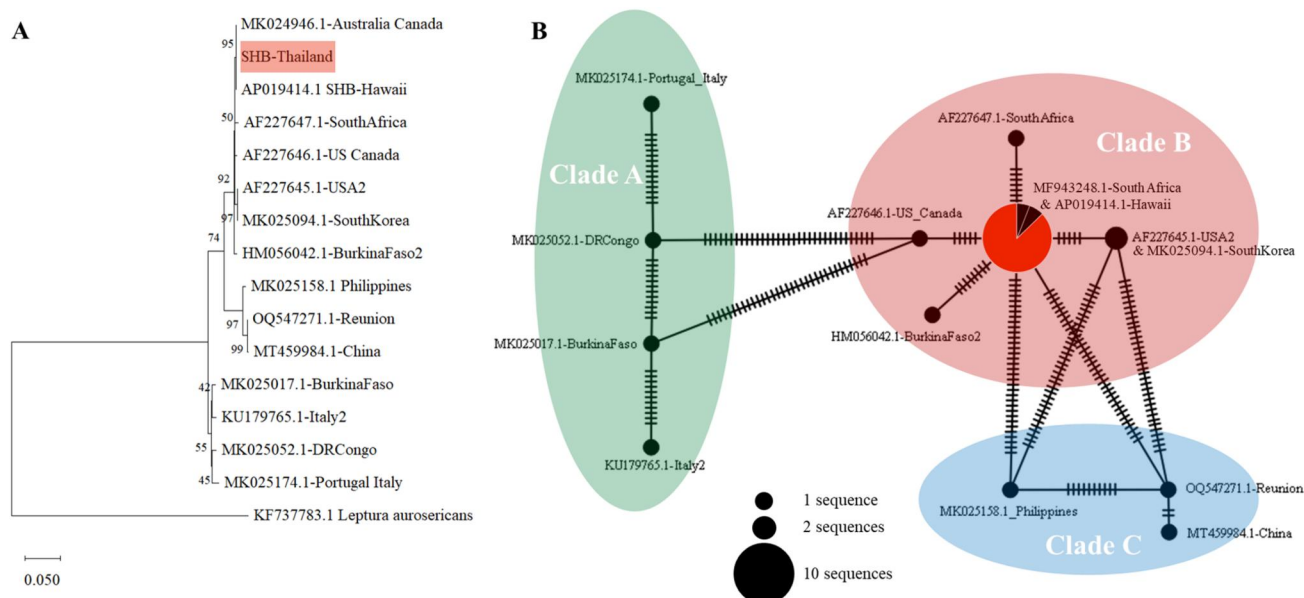


Figure 2. Comparison of small hive beetles (SHBs), *Aethina tumida*, mtDNA sequences from Thailand and other invasive and native populations.

Phylogenetic analysis of *A. tumida* from Thailand. (A) Maximum likelihood tree including sequences generated in this study (highlighted in red) as well as previously described SHB haplotypes with NCBI accession numbers and an outgroup (*Leptura aurosericans*). Numbers next to the nodes represent the statistical confidence associated with the branches (500 bootstraps). (B) COI haplotype network based on SHB samples collected in two apiaries in Thailand (N=14, in red), as well as previously described haplotypes with NCBI accession numbers (in black). The size of the back and red circles reflects the number of individual sequences within the haplotypes. The hatch marks represent the number of mutations between sequences and nodes. Figure drawn with PopART (Bandelt et al., 1999).

geographical proximity between the two countries had resulted in the invasion. The aligned sequence file was then used to build a haplotype network using the software PopART (Bandelt et al., 1999).

Characteristic features of SHBs were detected through scanning electron microscopy, including the specific antenna structure and distinctive elytral and pronotal patterns of *A. tumida* adults (Figure 1). In parallel, the genetic analysis revealed a single COI haplotype (**Accession number PZ159312**) in the 14 Thai samples analyzed, identical to previously sequenced SHB specimens from South Africa and Hawaii (Figure 2a). Notably, the SHB sample with the closest Asian origin was from South Korea, with five nucleotide substitutions out of 1,022 bp in the sequences compared (Figure 2b).

In summary, the results from the morphological and genetic analyses confirmed that the specimens collected in Thailand are *A. tumida*. Moreover, the genetic analyses suggest that a single introduction from a distant source led to the invasion of the two provinces studied, and not from China as initially suspected. Interestingly, the beekeeper from whom the infested *A. mellifera* colonies were purchased buys their stocks in Taiwan, a country that is not known to be infected to date. This suggests that the infected colonies may have only transited through Taiwan, and that complex invasion routes may be at play. Alternatively, bee products and, in particular, wax trade - a known driver of SHB invasions (Idrissou et al., 2019) - may have played a role in this new introduction. These results highlight the need

to regulate bee and bee product trade further to limit the spread of SHBs, and to understand its host range and impacts on native Asian bees better, as evidence shows that the pest can readily infest and mass-reproduce in *A. cerana* colonies.

Acknowledgments

Swiss Bee Research Centre, Agroscope Liebefeld and Institute of Bee Health, University of Bern, Switzerland; Agricultural Research Service, Bee Research Laboratory, USA, for research facilities and additional support.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This research was funded by the Bee Health and Their Hive Products for Supporting SDGs Research Unit, Department of Biology, Faculty of Science, Burapha University (GS), Thailand, Research Partnership Grant RPG_ ASEAN_072022_03 of the Swiss Leading House Asia (AB, GS). Funding was provided by the Vinetum Foundation to PN and LS, and The Swiss National Science Foundation to PN (310030_204479).

ORCID

Alexis L. Beaupaire <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9832-5609>

Lars Straub <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2091-1499>

Sanchai Naree  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7177-1863>
 Jakkrawut Maitip  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6265-1421>
 Steven Cook  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4927-1402>
 Yanping Chen  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5224-1100>
 Peter Neumann  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5163-5215>
 Gareth S. Powell  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0847-2718>
 James D. Ellis  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0318-8646>
 Jay D. Evans  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0036-4651>
 Guntima Suwannapong  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3180-4103>

References

- Bandelt, H. J., Forster, P., & Röhl, A. (1999). Median-joining networks for inferring intraspecific phylogenies. *Molecular Biology and Evolution*, 16(1), 37–48. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.molbev.a026036>
- Cervancia, C. R., de Guzman, L. I., Polintan, E. A., Dupo, A. L. B., & Locsin, A. A. (2016). Current status of small hive beetle infestation in the Philippines. *Journal of Apicultural Research*, 55(1), 74–77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00218839.2016.1194053>
- Chantawannakul, P., de Guzman, L. I., Li, J., & Williams, G. R. (2016). Parasites, pathogens, and pests of honeybees in Asia. *Apidologie*, 47(3), 301–324. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13592-015-0407-5>
- Duquesne, V., Delcont, A., Huleux, A., Beven, V., Touzain, F., & Ribière-Chabert, M. (2017). Complete mitochondrial genome sequence of *Aethina tumida* (Coleoptera: Nitidulidae), a beekeeping pest. *Genome Announcements*, 5(44), e01165-17. <https://doi.org/10.1128/genomeA.01165-17>
- Evans, J. D., Pettis, J. S., & Shimanuki, H. (2000). Mitochondrial DNA relationships in an emergent pest of honey bees: *Aethina tumida* (Coleoptera: Nitidulidae) from the United States and Africa. *Annals of the Entomological Society of America*, 93(3), 415–420. [https://doi.org/10.1603/0013-8746\(2000\)093\[0415:MDRIAE\]2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.1603/0013-8746(2000)093[0415:MDRIAE]2.0.CO;2)
- Granato, A., Zecchin, B., Baratto, C., Duquesne, V., Negrisol, E., Chauzat, M.-P., Ribière-Chabert, M., Cattoli, C., & Franco Mutinelli, F. (2017). Introduction of *Aethina tumida* (Coleoptera: Nitidulidae) in the regions of Calabria and Sicily (southern Italy). *Apidologie*, 48(2), 194–203. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13592-016-0465-3>
- Idrissou, F. O., Huang, Q., Yañez, O., & Neumann, P. (2019). International beeswax trade facilitates small hive beetle invasions. *Scientific Reports*, 9(1), 10665. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-019-47107-6>
- Kumar, S., Stecher, G., Suleski, M., Sanderford, M., Sharma, S., & Tamura, K. (2024). MEGA12: Molecular evolutionary genetic analysis version 12 for adaptive and green computing. *Molecular Biology and Evolution*, 41(12), msae263. <https://doi.org/10.1093/molbev/msae263>
- Liu, Y., Han, W., Gao, J., Su, S., Beaurepaire, A., Yañez, O., & Neumann, P. (2021). Out of Africa: Novel source of small hive beetles infesting Eastern and Western honey bee colonies in China. *Journal of Apicultural Research*, 60(1), 108–110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00218839.2020.1816686>
- Namin, S. M., Koh, Y., Osabutey, A. F., & Jung, C. (2019). Invasion pathway of the honeybee pest, small hive beetle, *Aethina tumida* (Coleoptera: Nitidulidae) in the republic of Korea inferred by mitochondrial DNA sequence analysis. *Journal of Asia-Pacific Entomology*, 22(3), 963–968. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aspen.2019.07.008>
- Neumann, P., & Elzen, P. J. (2004). The biology of the small hive beetle (*Aethina tumida*, Coleoptera: Nitidulidae): gaps in our knowledge of an invasive species. *Apidologie*, 35(3), 229–247. <https://doi.org/10.1051/apido:2004010>
- R Core Team (2016). R: A language and environment for statistical computing.
- Suwannapong, G., Seanbualuang, P., & Benbow, M. E. (2011). Using sensillum potential analysis to quantify pheromone sensing of the antennal sensilla of *Apis florea* Fabricius (1787), foragers and guards. *Journal of Asia-Pacific Entomology*, 14(1), 7–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aspen.2010.11.001>
- Technelysium, P. L. (n.d). Chromas Version 2.6.6.