

Media Release:

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Invasive Ants Army on the Move

Native ants are currently at war with exotic invasive ants which are competing for food and habitat and upsetting the natural ecosystem but Territory Government scientists are working on a rescue plan.

Northern Territory Government Senior Scientist Dr Anne Walters said it's difficult to contain invasive ant species once they are established so the focus is on prevention rather than managing the problem once it has arrived.

"We are undertaking research to help assess the current location of exotic ants in the Northern Territory," Dr Walters said.

"We will also be identifying the areas that they are likely to come from, improving our knowledge about the damage caused by these species, and identifying potential distributions of these ants in the future.

"Invasive exotic ants are undoubtedly one of the greatest threats to biodiversity and agriculture."

Two of the most threatening species of invasive ants, the red imported fire ant and the electric ant, a major concern in neighbouring Queensland, have not reached our borders yet despite their preference for tropical conditions.

"This puts the Territory in an excellent position to prevent further incursion, especially since these aggressive species have not yet become established here," Dr Walters said.

The ginger ant, yellow crazy ant and the big-headed ant are currently affecting various areas of the Northern Territory and in many locations worldwide exotic ants have completely displaced native ants.

"Our native ants play a very important role in the natural ecosystem: their burrowing helps to aerate the soil, their foraging activity adds nutrients to the soil and they also assist in the break-down of organic matter, which benefits other animals and plants," Dr Walters said.

"Native ants also collect the seeds from various Australian plants and transport them underground offering protection from predation by animals and harsh environmental conditions which enables the seed to germinate.

The Australian Government provided over \$100,000 in funding to the NT NRM Regional Body who have contracted the Northern Territory Government to undertake a research project to assess the distribution, potential spread, areas of incursion, and impacts of invasive ants in the Territory.

"Invasive ants are a major problem worldwide as they not only compete for food and habitat but they also prey on native wildlife such as grasshoppers and butterflies, with some species capable of preying on young native birds and reptiles," Dr Walters said.

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Media Note – for more information contact Dr Anne Walters on 0429 097 057
Media Note – Image credit to B, Rose and DEWHA

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