



Yellow Crazy ants (*Anoplolepis gracilipes*)

In 2008, the Northern Territory Government began a project to identify the occurrence and distribution of exotic ants within the Territory. The project was extremely successful with the Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport (NRETAS) receiving over 1000 samples from the communities and organisations.

A number of exotic species were recorded during this program, all of which have been previously reported in the Northern Territory. However, of particular concern was the fact that the Yellow Crazy ant (*Anoplolepis gracilipes*), which has only been previously recorded from Arnhem Land in the NT, was found in a sample collected from a residential address at Berrimah.

Description

Yellow Crazy ants are a yellow-brownish colour, and measure approximately 4mm long. They have particularly long legs and antennae. Their name is derived from the frenzied movements that they display when they have been disturbed.

Origin and distribution

Yellow Crazy ants were first described from India, however the exact origin of the species remains unknown as many scientists believe the species may have originated from Asia or Africa where the majority of this genus is from.

Yellow Crazy ants have invaded many countries worldwide. Their current range is almost entirely limited to tropical regions with the majority of recordings in south east Asia and the Indo-pacific region. They have also been detected in South Africa, Australia, Mexico, India, Tibet, Chile and California.

Within Australia, Yellow Crazy ants have been found on Christmas Island, north east Arnhem Land and Queensland (Brisbane and Cairns). Recently, Yellow Crazy ants were also detected in northern New South Wales.





Impacts

Yellow Crazy ants have been associated with declines in native invertebrates and vertebrates. These declines are usually a result of competition or predation, as Yellow Crazy ants are either faster at locating food or they swarm over native animals because of their huge colony sizes. Yellow Crazy ants do not bite, but spray formic acid on their competitors or prey, which causes extreme agitation. In some locations, these ants have been observed swarming over young birds in nests, skinks and other small reptiles, as well as native insects that are important for pollination of native plants.

In addition, research has shown that these ants also cause declines in seed dispersal, increased growth of sooty mould on trees and plants causing canopy trees to die, and reduced nutrient recycling in their introduced range.

Management techniques

Poison baits are the most effective method of controlling ants in field circumstances. The use of chemicals has the advantages of being able to treat large areas and the foraging ants passing on the toxins to worker and queen ants, thereby eliminating the whole colony.

People are encouraged to be very vigilant where Yellow Crazy ants are concerned – if you have these ants in your yard, it is important that you don't move equipment, pot plants or other items without thoroughly inspecting it first. This will reduce the likelihood of Yellow Crazy ant populations being spread further.

What can you do?

Firstly, inspect your equipment, goods and yard for Yellow Crazy ants.

Secondly, you can help us by collecting Yellow Crazy ants from your yard.

Ant Collection Kits are available from the Wildlife Management Unit by contacting Rachel on 08 8995 5036 or Rachel.pearce@nt.gov.au.

Alternatively, if you'd like more information, you can log onto our website:

<http://www.nt.gov.au/exoticants>