

WARNING

DECLARED

Electric ants *Wasmannia auropunctata*



Photo courtesy of Ellen Van Gelder (USGS-BRD)

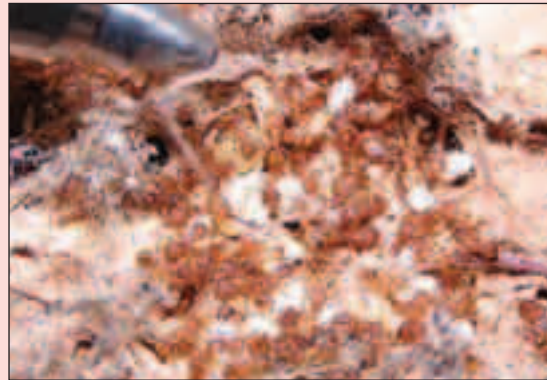


Photo NRMW staff



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Photo courtesy of Hawaii State, Department of Agriculture

- Very small - 1.5 mm in length, ginger in colour
- Visible feeding trails
- Painful sting
- Environmental and urban pest
- Please call 132523 if found.

Description

Electric ants (*Wasmannia auropunctata*) are an introduced exotic species native to central and South America. Adults are very small, about 1.5mm in length and ginger coloured.

The name Electric ant is derived from their painful sting. Another common name is little fire ant which also refers to the sting.

Electric ants do not have defined nests in the soil. Instead they use available spaces such as under leaf debris and stones, in rotten limbs or in trees. They may move into houses where they may infest beds, furniture and food. Nests may be moved into buildings or trees during heavy rains to escape flooding. Electric ants are now found in several of our near neighbours in the Pacific region including New Caledonia, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

Electric ants *Wasmannia auropunctata*

The problem

Electric ants are widely regarded as environmental pests and are included as one of the world's worst 100 invasive species by the Invasive Species Specialist Group (ISSG) of the World Conservation Union. They have the ability to form multi-queened colonies, in which ants occur at very high densities. These colonies can cause significant disruption to natural environments including the decimation of tortoise populations on the Galapagos Islands and declines in native birds animals and plants on islands in the Pacific.

Electric ants inject powerful venom when they sting. The sting can be painful and may remain itchy for up to three days. They do not sting en masse like red imported fire ants but sting when coming into contact with people. Given the small size of the ants, it is unlikely that people will notice them before being stung. The ant has been known to sting domestic pets as they are attracted to pet food. In rare cases, cats and dogs have been blinded from multiple stings to the eyes.

Electric ants protect sap-sucking insects such as scales and mealybugs, farming them for their sugary exudate. This exudate produces sooty mould which reduces the vigour of the plants.

The ants are known to cause some impacts on horticulture industries, mostly linked to the stinging of employees and through the effects of the sap-sucking insects.

Controlling Electric ants

Outbreaks of Electric ants will be controlled by Queensland Government officers with insecticide treated baits. Bait pellets laced with insecticide are spread in the vicinity of the nests. The foraging ants then collect the pellets and carry them back to the colony. They are then fed to the rest of the colony including the queens. As the queens are the only ants able to reproduce, the death of the queen ensures that the colony is destroyed.

Slow acting insecticides are the most effective as they allow the foraging worker ants to take the baits into the nest before the bait fatally overwhelms them.

What should I do?

The response to Electric ants is being managed as a Queensland government response.

If you believe you have seen a colony of electric ants, please call the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (DPI&F) Business Information Centre on 132523 or contact your local council pest management/ environment officer or your local Natural Resources, Mines and Water, Environmental Protection Agency or DPI&F office.

Please call the DPI&F Business Information Centre Centre on 132523 for further information or visit www.epa.qld.gov.au, www.nrm.qld.gov.au or www.dpi.qld.gov.au.

Declaration details

Electric ants have been declared under the *Plant Protection Act 1989*.

The declaration establishes a pest quarantine area so that movement of high risk items which may spread the ant can be controlled. High risk items may not be moved within or out of the pest quarantine area without specific approval from an inspector operating under the Plant Protection Act. The declaration also provides for government officers to undertake surveillance and treatment on all properties within the pest quarantine area.