



Australian Government

Department of Infrastructure,  
Transport, Regional Development,  
Communications and the Arts



Department of  
Primary Industries and  
Regional Development



# Biosecurity alert: Exotic invasive ants

## Yellow crazy ant (*Anoplolepis gracilipes*)

They may be tiny but don't be fooled! Exotic invasive ants are among the most serious pests when they are introduced into new environments. Native ants play an important role in maintaining healthy ecosystems, but invasive ants are aggressive and can displace native ants. Invasive ants can spread quickly, dominating new environments and can sometimes have catastrophic impacts on native plants and animals, agriculture, human health, lifestyle, and the economy.

There are several exotic pest ant species throughout the Indian Ocean Territories, but the most invasive and aggressive species are tropical fire ants (TFA; *Solenopsis geminata*), Singapore ants (SA; *Trichomyrmex destructor*) and yellow crazy ants (YCA; *Anoplolepis gracilipes*).

All three species are well established within Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. While YCA are throughout all islands, the highest population densities of SA and TFA in the Cocos (Keeling) Islands are within populated areas on West and Home Islands. TFA and SA are a nuisance to the public because of their painful stings. TFA are a serious threat to ground-nesting

birds on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, and care must be taken to prevent their spread between the islands. On Christmas Island, YCA are extreme environmental pests, causing declines in native ant populations, affecting ground nesting birds and a keystone native species, the blue-tailed skink (*Cryptoblepharus egeriae*). The ants have killed millions of red crabs (*Gecarcoidea natalis*) and impact robber crabs (*Birgus latro*), both of which play an important role in the island's forest ecology. They are also directly responsible for the proliferation of sap-sucking bugs and sooty moulds that severely damage plants, further degrading the island's ecosystem.



## LOOK for these pests

### Tropical fire ants

Tropical fire ants have a shiny red-brown body with a darker abdomen. Worker sizes range from 3-8mm, with the large major ants having oversized square shaped heads. They are generalist feeders known to eat seeds, eggs, reptiles, and other ground dwelling species. They are known for their aggressive nature and painful stings. Mature colonies have up to 100,000 individuals and multiple queens.



*Tropical fire ants*

- Nests are usually found in public areas, like golf courses, school grounds, playgrounds, and picnic spots.
- They can be found in cleared or disturbed areas by looking for slightly raised piles of loose soil.
- Each nest can have several entrance holes with dirt spread widely around.
- Nests are not always obvious as foraging tunnels can radiate for several metres below the ground surface.
- Workers usually forage within 15-50m from the nest.



*The nesting mound of tropical fire ant*

### Singapore ants

Singapore ants are smaller ants with a reddish-brown body and an almost black abdomen, with workers ranging in size from 1.8–3.1mm.



*Singapore ants*

- The ants can nest in the wild, but they have also become well adapted to living with humans.
- They can be found outside and throughout the home foraging for sugar, fats, and protein rich food.
- As their scientific name 'destructor' suggests, they can damage electrical appliances and wiring by chewing through plastics, insulation, and rubber.
- Singapore ants are known to disable telecommunication and electrical equipment and cause electrical short-circuits and fires when the insulation of housing or vehicle wiring is damaged.

## Yellow crazy ants

Yellow crazy ants are a yellow to brownish colour with dark brown (sometimes stripey) abdomen, a long slender body (5mm), legs and antennae. When disturbed, they move in an erratic 'crazy' manner.



*Yellow crazy ants*

- This species can form super-colonies and spray formic acid which can cause burning of the skin and eyes of animals and humans.
- They are a highly invasive environmental pest causing massive declines in the red crab populations on Christmas Island.
- The ants are highly active, especially before rain and storms.
- They are commonly found in high numbers in garden beds, agricultural and horticultural settings, and in disturbed or natural bushland.
- They often have large, interconnected nests under piles of timber, logs, debris, and leaf litter, or at the base of trees.

## Exotic ant control

- The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) DOES NOT recommend the use of ant powders, or insecticidal dusts to control exotic ants because they repel ants.
- Exotic invasive ant species mentioned can be successfully, safely, and inexpensively controlled using granular ant baits available in most garden centres, hardware stores, agricultural and chemical retailers and online.
- Granular baits contain ingredients that are highly attractive to some ant species. They are collected by the workers and taken back to the nest as food.
- Some granular ant baits contain insect growth regulators (e.g. pyriproxyfen), which sterilise the queens and act to stop the development of the brood in the nest.
- Other granular baits contain a low dose of flea or cockroach insecticides, e.g. hydramethylnon, fipronil, or indoxacarb.
- DPIRD ant control trials within targeted areas in the Cocos (Keeling) Islands demonstrate rapid and sustained control of TFA, SA and YCA populations following treatment with granular baits.
- A micro-wasp (*Tachardiaephagus somervillei*) is being used as a biological control agent to control YCA on Christmas Island. The wasp attacks a particular scale insect, which produces honeydew, the ant's primary food source on the island. These solitary wasps don't sting or harm humans, native wildlife, or horticulture.



*Use granular ant baits to control exotic ants*

## Been stung by an ant?

People can get stung by ants when they approach or disturb their nests. Ant stings can be painful with burning and itching that can last for days and although rare, can lead to an allergic reaction.

- Wash the sting area with soap and water and apply an ice/cold pack to relieve swelling and pain.
- Seek medical attention if you are allergic to insect stings, or experience general symptoms, such as rash, nausea, headache, swelling of the face, tongue or throat, or difficulty breathing.



Scan for more information on ants, identification and control.



## REPORT

As these three exotic invasive ant species are already well established throughout the Indian Ocean Territories, there is no need to report suspect sightings. However, under the *Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007* (BAM Act), the introduction of tropical fire ants and yellow crazy ants into Western Australia is prohibited and any suspect sightings on mainland Australia must be reported. If you suspect you see tropical fire ant, or yellow crazy ant on mainland Australia, please report them immediately via MyPestGuide or PaDIS.



### Report your observations

MyPestGuide® Reporter  
via app or online  
[mypestguide.agric.wa.gov.au](https://mypestguide.agric.wa.gov.au)

Pest and Disease Information Service  
(08) 9368 3080  
[padis@dpird.wa.gov.au](mailto:padis@dpird.wa.gov.au)

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