

BIOSECURITY SA – Plant Health

Exotic Plant Pest Hotline: **1800 084 881** (available 24 hours)

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BIOSECURITY SA
PIRSA

Electric ant or Little Fire ant *Wasmannia auropunctata*

First detected in Queensland in May 2006 at Smithfield, a northern Cairns suburb. It has since been found in several other areas in Far North Queensland. Biosecurity Queensland is undertaking an electric ant eradication program – for the latest information, visit the Queensland Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry website.

The Electric ant has not been detected in South Australia.

Native to Central and South America, electric ants are part of the tramp ant group – an invasive ant species that are able to survive in new environments that have an absence of their natural enemies.



Electric ants on end of chopstick Photo Courtesy: Ellen Van Gelder, USGS

Description:

Electric ant workers are monomorphic, which means they display no physical differentiation. They are very small – only about 1.5 mm long, light to golden brown in colour. The queens are about 4 mm long and are similar in colour to the workers.

Behavior:

Electric ants prey on and compete with other insects and can displace large numbers of native ants. They can also inflict painful stings on wild and domestic animals and on humans.

Electric ant workers are very slow moving unlike most other kinds of ants. At times they move so slowly that they are not observed until someone becomes the victim of their very painful, burning sting. Unlike other fire ants, electric ants are not likely to defend themselves in a large, stinging swarm. Instead, they are much less aggressive and will sting only when pressed upon by an unsuspecting person or animal. One ant can sting many times and the reaction from their sting varies from moderate to severe pain and swelling that can last up to several days. In general, if someone is being stung but no ants are seen, electric ants are often the cause.

Habitat and Diet:

Several queens and large numbers of workers, pupae, larvae, and eggs make up an electric ant nest, which can often be found beneath common forest floor debris, in tree crotches, and under flower pots. Additionally, the nests have been reported in structural wall voids and in palms or palmettos plant sheaths. Electric ants rarely enter homes, but when they do they are likely foraging for food. In their natural outdoor locations, they consume honeydew that is secreted by aphids and scales, plus obtain protein by feeding on dead and living arthropods. In search of food, electric ants trail along sidewalks and foundations up around buildings. Inside homes, ant trails are likely to be found along baseboards.

Electric ants spread mostly through human activity with the movement of plants, plant products or edible material. Once the ant has established it is known to spread up to 170m per year.

To report suspected electric ants, call the **EXOTIC PLANT PEST HOTLINE 1800 084 881**