Fact sheet

Browsing ant (Lepisiota frauenfeldi)

What is browsing ant?

Browsing ant is a tramp ant species that is native to southern Europe and thrives in a Mediterranean climate. It is exotic and has not yet established in Australia.

They are a slender, shiny, dark brown ant about 3–4mm in length. Browsing ants are often seen in large numbers and run about in a haphazard manner when disturbed. They do not have a strong ‘ant smell’ when crushed.

These aggressive ants are ideally suited to Australian conditions. They form multi-queened super-colonies and monopolise food resources, quickly reaching very high populations and displacing native ant species and other invertebrates. They would likely become a significant horticultural, environmental and domestic pest if established in Australia.

Browsing ant in Australia

Browsing ant was discovered at Perth Airport in 2013 followed by another detection at a freight depot in Belmont in August 2014. These were the first detections of this ant species in Australia. Further detections were made in Welshpool in February 2017, Kewdale in July 2017, and Bullsbrook in February 2018. Eradication and surveillance activities are ongoing.

Browsing ants have since been discovered in Darwin in 2015 and Brisbane in 2019 where they are also under eradication.

Why is browsing ant a problem?

Browsing ants have been observed tending sap-sucking insects and can have a significant detrimental effect on native vegetation. They attain high populations, will forage indoors, and displace native ants and other invertebrate species. Because of this, they present a risk to Western Australia's billion dollar annual horticultural industry, the environment and human amenity as a household, community and garden pest. Browsing ants have been declared an invasive exotic ant pest of national significance by the Australian government and all known infestations are under eradication.

Watch out!

Ants are often difficult to identify! There are a number of ants that have not established in Western Australia, but could significantly impact our outdoor lifestyle and WA's agricultural industries and environment. See overleaf for reportable species!
Exotic ant threats to WA

Under the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007 (BAM Act) the introduction of these ants into WA is prohibited and any suspect sightings must be reported. Below are a few species we are particularly concerned about.

**Browsing ant** *(Lepisiota frauenfeldi)*

Native to southern Europe, they thrive in a Mediterranean climate and are ideally suited to Australian conditions. These aggressive ants form multi-queened super-colonies, quickly reaching very high populations and displacing native ant species and other invertebrates. They are also a significant horticultural and domestic pest. There have been a number of incursions in Australia, although all known infestations are under eradication.

**Red imported fire ants** *(Solenopsis invicta)*

One of the most serious ant pests in the world. These ants are aggressive, particularly near the nest and inflict a painful sting. They are present in south east Queensland and they could accidently be imported into Western Australia.

**Electric ants** *(Wasmannia auropunctata)*

One of the world’s worst invasive species, with a painful sting that will impact on outdoor lifestyle, the environment and agricultural industries. These ants are currently in northern Queensland and eradication efforts are underway.

**Yellow crazy ants** *(Anoplolepis gracilipes)*

Ability to spray formic acid which causes burning and irritates the skin and eyes of animals and humans. Found in the Pacific region and on Christmas Island, this ant has also spread extensively since arriving in Queensland.

**Carpenter ants** *(Camponotus spp.)*

Elsewhere in the world there are Camponotus species that are pests of timber and like termites, if left unchecked can cause extensive damage to structural timber and furniture.

**Reporting options**

Report unfamiliar, problematic or possible exotic pests via the options below:

- Pest and Disease Information Service *(08) 9368 3080* or padis@dpird.wa.gov.au
- MyPestGuide™ Reporter App
- mypestguide.agric.wa.gov.au

For more information, see agric.wa.gov.au/ants

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