



Little Fire Ant/Electric Ant

Taxonomy

Order: Hymenoptera

Family: Formicidae

Species: *Wasmannia auropunctata* (Roger)

Synonyms: *Ochetomyrmex auropunctatus* (Roger);

Tetramorium auropunctatum Roger

Summary

Little fire ant is a Neotropical species that has spread to parts of Africa, North America, Caribbean, Pacific, and Australia. It is a highly invasive pest that reduces both invertebrate and vertebrate biodiversity. It is considered one of the 100 worst invasive species of the world by the IUCN due to its negative impact on natural ecosystems, agriculture and human health. It is renowned for its diminutive proportions and painful sting, hence the common name.

Biology

Found in a wide array of habitats such as primary forest or young second growth both wet and dry forest. However, they tend to be more ubiquitous in disturbed habitats. Nests can be found in a variety of material including leaf litter, dead wood, under stones, hollow stems, under epiphytes, in tree canopies etc. It is a generalist omnivore preferring to feed on invertebrates (dead & alive), seeds and honeydew. It may also feed on dead vertebrates or vertebrates that they have managed to overwhelm.

Distribution in Caribbean

Common throughout the Caribbean region, including Anguilla and TCI in disturbed and natural habitats. First found in Anguilla in 2006 (J.K. Wetterer, MCZ): Windward Point. First found in Turks & Caicos in 2010 (J.K. Wetterer, MCZ): 1 km west of East End, Providenciales.



Profile view of a minor worker of
Wasmannia auropunctata © April Nobile / AntWeb.org

Pathway of Entry

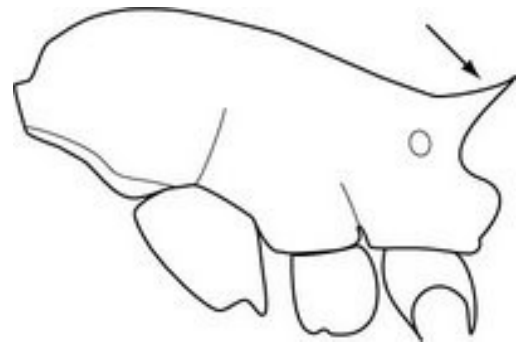
Natural dispersal: A newly inseminated queen, accompanied by some workers, establishes a new satellite colony (known as budding). Dispersal between islands may be via floating vegetation and deadwood.
Intentional/Anthropogenic dispersal: nests are frequently formed at tree bases and in potted plants. They are thus regularly spread via plant and soil material. Other modes include infested passenger luggage, empty sea containers, timber, fresh produce, vehicles etc. Their minute size aids dispersal.

Impact

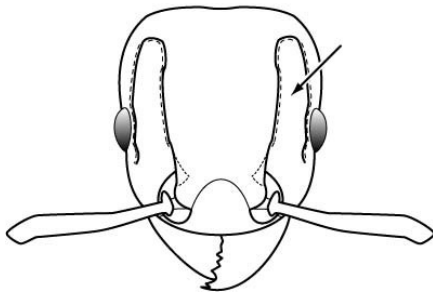
Native biodiversity is adversely affected in the presence of this species. It may outcompete native ant-fauna as well as other arthropod life. It is found to affect vertebrates such as reptiles and amphibians. This species is notorious for its painful sting relative to its size. This can be particularly a problem for plantation workers, horticulturists, builders etc. that might disturb foraging ants or worse, a nest. Many of their nests may even reside up in tree canopies. It may sting and blind domestic animals like cats, dogs etc.



Anterior view of a minor worker of *Wasmannia auropunctata* April Nobile / © AntWeb.org



Profile view of *Wasmannia auropunctata* showing the long propodeal spines. Eli Sarnat / © PIAkey



Anterior view of *Wasmannia auropunctata* showing the presence of strong antennal scrobes. Eli Sarnat / © PIAkey

Further Information:

https://www.antwiki.org/wiki/Wasmannia_auropunctata

<https://www.cabi.org/isc/datasheet/56704>

Field Description

Wasmannia auropunctata are mainly recognised by the following suite of characters: petiole comprising 2 segments, long spines at the posterior end of the propodeum (see pictures), antennae composed of 11 segments and ending with a 2-segmented club and sparse covering of the body with long, erect hairs. It has very distinct, strong antennal scrobes. Specimens tend to be very sculptured in appearance and range in colour from pale yellow/orange to red and dark brown. They are particularly small at ~1.5mm.

Similar Species

Solenopsis Invicta (RIFA) or red imported fire-ant has two petiole segments, often similar colouration and a painful sting. However, RIFA has a polymorphic (variable) worker caste, usually >2mm and 10 antennal segments. *Wasmannia auropunctata* is also similar in appearance to *Tetramorium* spp., however these tend to have 12 segmented antennae and longer propodeal spines.