

## **MEDIA RELEASE: 21 February 2014**

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### **Eradication program in the pipeline for Kuranda crazy ants**

The Wet Tropics Management Authority plans to commence a yellow crazy ant eradication program for the Kuranda region in April.

Authority executive director Andrew Maclean said a portion of the funding received from the Australian Government late last year for yellow crazy ant eradication south of Cairns will be funnelled into the Kuranda infestation.

"We recognise the significant threat the Kuranda infestation has to the [biodiversity of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area](#) and consider the infestation a high priority given its proximity to the Barron River and therefore, the risk of spread," Mr Maclean said.

"The yellow crazy ant infestation in Kuranda is still quite small so there is a good prospect to be able to eliminate this new infestation before the colony becomes too established. At the same time we will continue to monitor and treat the existing colonies south of Cairns," he added

Mr Maclean said the Authority and its partners in the yellow crazy ant eradication program are calling upon land holders in the vicinity of the Kuranda infestation to be especially vigilant and protect their properties from this severely debilitating pest.

"We have already contacted those land holders who have property affected by the infestation. While the Authority intends to commence yellow crazy ant eradication in Kuranda, we encourage landowners and others to seek opportunities to source additional funding wherever possible."

"We commend those landholders have begun their own baiting treatments but we do ask landholders to contact the Authority before embarking on private baiting program to ensure it complements our existing eradication program," Mr Maclean said.

Early detection is vital. Landholders can contact the Wet Tropics Management Authority on 4241 0500 for advice and assistance.

The Authority is coordinating the yellow crazy ant eradication program in collaboration with landholders, Conservation Volunteers, James Cook University, Biosecurity Queensland, FNQ Regional Organisation of Councils, Cairns Regional Council, QPWS and CSIRO.

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## About yellow crazy ants

Yellow crazy ants are one of the world's **100 worst invasive species**.

Yellow crazy ants are a social and environmental pest invading suburban backyards, agricultural crops and the **Wet Tropics World Heritage Area**.

Unlike other ants that bite or sting, yellow crazy ants **spray formic acid** to subdue prey or to defend themselves, and can **burn or irritate the skin and eyes of people**.

**Native animals and domestic pets** are especially at risk of burns and blindness when the acid is sprayed in eyes.

The term 'crazy ant' originated because of the ants' erratic walking style and frantic movements.

Warning:

- Avoid close contact especially to your face
- Wash your hands after contact with yellow crazy ants.
- Seek medical attention.

## Why are they so bad for the environment?

The ants 'farm' honeydew (a sugary liquid) by protecting sap-sucking insects (like scale and aphids). This leads to spread of **sooty mould** that weakens plants, and can further lead to **dieback** of plants and crops such as sugar cane, fruit trees, and backyard vegie gardens.

In addition to sugars, yellow crazy ants need **protein** to breed. In infested areas, **small animals** such as native ants, insects, spiders, worms, frogs, skinks and nesting birds are aggressively preyed upon, severely depleting their numbers or, in some cases, eliminating certain species.

The ants **take over** burrows and nesting holes of animals such as birds and brush turkeys to establish numerous nests with **multiple queens**. Eventually, yellow crazy ants form **super-colonies** making eradication extremely difficult.

## How to identify yellow crazy ants

- 5mm body length (or half the size of a green ant)
- long legs and antennae
- Brownish-yellow or orange-yellow, with a brown abdomen, sometimes striped
- Erratic, frantic, "crazy" movement (unlike other ants that walk in a line)
- Able to forage day and night but less active in intense heat and heavy rain.

### Where you might find them

Yellow crazy ants lay their eggs in damp niches, under rocks and logs, leaf litter, in boxes, plant pots, furniture and even wall cavities. They also take over the burrows and nesting holes of birds and other animals (e.g. bush turkey nests).

### What you can do

Yellow crazy ants are mostly **spread** when they hitch a ride with people in timber, soil, vegetation, garden waste, pot plants, picnic and camping gear or via waterways. That's why they are also called '**Tramp Ants.**'

- only dispose of vegetation, plants and soil at approved council sites
- spray pot plants with insecticide when moving home
- check your yard regularly for signs of yellow crazy ants.

### Legislation

Under the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002*, landholders are required to take reasonable steps to keep their land free of these pests. Residents are encouraged to reduce risk of further spread and report suspected YCA sightings to Biosecurity on the number below.

Report illegal dump sites to:

- Cairns Regional Council on 4044 3044
- Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23
- Wet Tropics Management Authority 4241 0500

For more information about yellow crazy ants visit <http://www.wettropics.gov.au/stamp-out-tramp-ants.html>