

Termite males enhance mating encounters by changing speed according to density

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27	Abstract (< 350 words)			
28 90	1. Search theory predicts that animals evolve efficient movement patterns to enhance encounter			
29 20	which may explain the observation that enimals often switch their measurements ratterne			
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- 32 evaluated because it is difficult to examine the actual encounter dynamics.
- Here we studied how partner-seeking termites update their search strategies depending on the
 local densities of potential mates. After a dispersal flight, termites drop their wings and walk to
 search for a mate; when a female and a male meet, they form a female-led tandem pair and
 search for a favorable nesting site. If a pair is separated, they have two search options: reunite
 with their stray partner, or seek a new partner. We hypothesized that the density of individuals
 affects separation-reunion dynamics and thus the optimal search strategy.
- 39 3. We observed the searching process across different densities and found that termite pairs were
 40 often separated but obtained a new partner quickly at high mate density. After separation, while
 41 females consistently slowed down, males increased their speed according to the density. Under
 42 high mate density, separated males obtained a partner earlier than females, who do not change
 43 movement with density.
- 44 4. Our data-based simulations confirmed that the observed behavioral change by males contributes
 45 to enhancing encounters. Males at very low mate densities did best to move slowly and thereby
 46 reduce the risk of missing their stray partner, who is the only available mate. On the other hand,
 47 males that experienced high mate densities did better in mating encounters by moving fast
 48 because the risk of isolation is low, and they must compete with other males to find a partner.
- 5. These results demonstrate that termite males adaptively update their search strategy depending
 on conditions. Understanding the encounter dynamics experienced by animals is key to
 connecting empirical work to the idealized search processes of theoretical studies.

53 Introduction

54Animals move to search for food, nest sites, and mates, which is essential for their survival and 55reproduction (Bell, 1990; Nathan et al., 2008). Search theory predicts that animals engage in random search when locations of targets are uncertain, and they evolve efficient movement patterns to 5657enhance encounter rates with specific targets (Bartumeus, Da Luz, Viswanathan, & Catalan, 2005; 58Viswanathan, Luz, Raposo, & Stanley, 2011). Simulation studies of random search have proved that 59there is no universal solution to any search problems; instead, search efficiency of movement 60 patterns strongly depends on the information available to searchers and on environmental 61conditions (Abe & Shimada, 2015; Ferreira, Raposo, Viswanathan, & Da Luz, 2012; Reynolds & 62Bartumeus, 2009). Supporting this idea, animals often change their movement patterns according to 63 conditions. Studies analyzing GPS data of wildlife suggest that animals do not use a single search 64strategy but alternate between different movement patterns (e.g., Brownian walk and Lévy walk) in 65areas with different resource distributions (Auger-Méthé et al., 2016; Humphries et al., 2010; Sims, 66Humphries, Bradford, & Bruce, 2012). Laboratory experiments manipulating the availability of 67targets have also demonstrated that animals change their movement patterns according to their 68 situation (Bartumeus, Peters, Pueyo, Marrase, & Catalan, 2003; Cloyed & Dell, 2019; Mizumoto & 69 Dobata, 2019). Thus, condition-dependent behavioral change is critical to connecting search theory 70to empirical animal movements.

71Among factors that affect the searching process, the density of targets is fundamental. For 72example, predators searching for food commonly increase search effort by moving slowly and 73sinuously within patches with high resource densities, a behavior referred to as area-restricted search 74(Banks, 1957; Murdie & Hassell, 1973; Weimerskirch, Pinaud, Pawlowski, & Bost, 2007). In mate 75search, the density of females and males will change both the availability of targets and the 76abundance of competitors, which can substantially affect the selective pressure on searching 77strategies (Berec, Kramer, Bernhauerová, & Drake, 2018; Kokko & Rankin, 2006; Mizumoto, Abe, & 78Dobata, 2017). Some studies have found that mate searchers move faster and more actively in high 79densities of conspecifics than in low densities (DeRivera, Backwell, Christy, & Vehrencamp, 2003; 80 Holwell, Allen, Goudie, Duckett, & Painting, 2016; Jirotkul, 1999). Moreover, in some species, it has 81 been demonstrated that sexual selection favors high male locomotion activity during mate search 82(Able, 1999). This behavioral change can be adaptive by overcoming competitors when multiple 83 potential mates are available. However, behavioral change during mate search is rarely evaluated in 84 terms of encounter efficiency, because of the difficulty of examining the actual encounter dynamics.

85 Here we study the encounter dynamics of partner-seeking termites across different densities. 86 During swarming season, mature termite colonies synchronously produce large quantities of alates 87 (winged imagos) that fly off in a large swarm and disperse (Mullins et al., 2015). Dispersed alates shed 88 their wings and walk in search of a mating partner (Nutting, 1969; Vargo & Husseneder, 2009). Both 89 females and males are poorly informed because they search in a completely unfamiliar environment, 90 and pairing pheromones emitted by females work only within short distances or on contact in some 91species (Bordereau & Pasteels, 2011; Sillam-Dussès, 2011). Successfully encountered couples 92perform tandem runs to seek a suitable nest site and found a colony. In tandem runs, a leading 93 female decides the course of movement, and a male follows the female by maintaining almost 94contact with her back (Valentini, Mizumoto, Pratt, Pavlic, & Walker, 2020). As the pairing process is 95extremely limited in time, termites should optimize their search patterns to increase the chance of 96 encounter before all potential mates progressively become unavailable. Both females and males 97explore wide areas to enhance random encounters before pairing, while if the pair gets separated, the 98 leading female pauses and the following male moves, which enhances reunion rates (Mizumoto & 99 Dobata, 2019). We hypothesize that this reunion process will be profoundly affected by the density of 100individuals (Fig. 1). In low-density conditions, the lost partner is the only likely nearby mate, hence 101each termite should move in a way that facilitates reunion. Under high densities, separated 102individuals can search either for the stray partner or for a new partner, which will change their 103 optimal movement pattern.

104 The termite, Coptotermes gestroi (Wasmann, 1896) (Blattodea, Rhinotermitidae), experiences a 105variety of densities in natural conditions. In this species, newly dispersed females and males often 106 gather on a tree trunk (Fig. 1), where the abundance of individuals can widely change depending on the day, ranging from ~1 to ~10,000 individuals/m² (Chouvenc, Helmick, & Su, 2015; Chouvenc, 107108Scheffrahn, Mullins, & Su, 2017). Because of this life-history trait, we expect that they have evolved 109to change their search behavior with density. Furthermore, as the pairing pheromone of *Coptotermes* 110termites has low volatility and primarily works upon contact (Chouvenc, Sillam-Dussès, & Robert, 111 2020; Raina et al., 2003), C. gestroi is expected to rely on random search rather than long-distance 112navigation during mate search. In this study, we test how density affects pair-forming dynamics and 113individual searching behavior in C. gestroi. We found that males change their walking speed when a 114pair gets separated, depending on the potential mate density they experience. Using data-based 115simulations, we confirm that termite males update movement patterns adaptively during mate 116 search. 117

Coptotermes gestroi



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Figure 1. Mate search scheme of a termite, *Coptotermes gestroi*. In the mating season, alates fly off in large swarms at dusk and then land to aggregate on a tree trunk. They shed their wings and walk to search for a mating partner. Encountered pairs perform tandem running, but pairs are often accidentally separated. A separated female temporarily pauses while a male moves to facilitate re-encounters. At the same time, they also have the option to encounter a new partner to initiate another tandem pair, especially under high-density conditions.

126 **1. Materials and Methods**

127 **2.1 Termites and experimental setup**

C. gestroi is a critical structural pest species with a substantial economic impact. This species is
 native to South East Asia and has been introduced in various parts of the neotropics and subtropics,
 including Florida, the Antilles and South America (Chouvenc et al., 2016). We collected alates of *C. gestroi* using a light-trapping system at dusk between March 5th and March 18th in 2019 in Broward
 County (Florida, USA). All collected individuals were brought back to the laboratory and maintained
 on wet cardboard at 28°C. We used individuals that shed their wings by themselves and observed
 their behaviors within 24 hours after the flight.

135To observe mate search behavior of termite dealates, we prepared an experimental arena by136filling a petri dish (\emptyset =140mm) with moistened plaster so that the surface of the arena could be137cleaned by scraping off plaster before each trial. The petri dish was covered with a clear lid during

138observations. A video camera was mounted vertically above the arena, and the camera system was 139adjusted so that the arena filled the camera frame. We placed different numbers of termites (1, 2, 4, 140or 8 females and the same number of males) in the experimental arena and recorded their behavior using cameras. We allowed termites to gather information about local density for the first 10 minutes, 141142and then extracted the coordinates of termite movements from each video for the next 10 minutes 143for data analysis, using the video-tracking system UMATracker (Yamanaka & Takeuchi, 2018). All 144videos were downsampled to a rate of five frames per second. To help visual identification, we 145marked females and males with one dot on the abdomen using paint markers of different colors 146(PX-20; Mitsubishi). We discarded 14 videos of 1 pair because no tandem was observed. We obtained 147data for 27, 9, 9, and 13 replicates for 1, 2, 4, and 8 pairs, respectively. The number of replicates 148varied depending on alate availability and time availability. Each individual was used only once 149within 12 hours after collection. All data analyses were performed using R v3.6.1 (R Core Team, 1502019).

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152 **2.2** Analysis of termite movements across different densities

153During observations, each termite was in one of three states: (i) tandem running, (ii) interacting 154but not tandem running, and (iii) searching. We automatically classified the states of termites based 155on a time sequence of coordination of each individual, as follows. We defined a female and a male as 156interacting (or tandem running) when the distance between their centroids was less than 9.75 mm 157 $(1.3 \times \text{mean body length})$. This distance was chosen to slightly exceed the body length of termites 158including antennae, because termites in a tandem run are nearly in physical contact (Mizumoto & 159Dobata, 2019). An interacting pair was considered to be performing a tandem run only if they met the 160following criteria. First, the interaction needed to last for more than 5 seconds; a very short 161separation (< 2 seconds) was not regarded as a separation event unless the distance between 162individuals was greater than 20 mm. Second, both termites needed to move more than 30 mm while 163interacting. After separation, we considered that individuals engage in separation search until they 164interact with an individual again for more than 1 second.

165We obtained the following numbers of observations for the 1-, 2-, 4-, and 8-pair treatments, 166respectively: 95, 70, 146, and 714 complete tandem events for females (and 95, 68, 130, and 621 for 167males); 112, 72, 142, and 595 separation events for females (and 112, 68, 146, 668 for males). In 168multiple pair conditions, the number of tandem and separation events was different between sexes, 169because interactions with more than two individuals sometimes happened. We first compared the 170duration of tandem running among treatments. We used the Cox proportional hazard model, with 171the number of termites, sex, and their interaction treated as fixed effects. The likelihood ratio test 172was used to determine the statistical significance of each explanatory variable (type II test). Then we 173used a similar Cox proportional hazard model to examine the duration to find a partner after a separation event. As we found a significant effect of sex (χ^2_1 = 37.77, P < 0.001) and no significant 174effect of the interaction of sex and density (χ^2_1 = 1.143, *P* = 0.285), we compared the duration of 175176separation search between sexes for each density, using log-rank tests after generating Kaplan-Meier 177survival curves. For these analyses, we removed observations censored by the beginning or the end of 178the observation period. Note that including censored data in our analysis did not affect the 179conclusion. We present the analysis without censored data for better visibility of the results.

We examined the heading directions of females and males when they separated from their partners, because their relative orientation can significantly affect the chances of reunion (Franks et al., 2010). We measured each termite's orientation as the motion direction from the frame just before the separation to the frame in which separation was detected. Then, for each termite, we measured the angle between its orientation and a straight line connecting the two termites' positions. These angles gave each termite's orientation relative to the location of its former partner. For each sex and density condition, we performed a Rayleigh test to check if the relative orientation is biased.

187 Next, we measured the termites' movement patterns, focusing on a time window that started 5
188 seconds before separation and ended 10 seconds after separation. We used correlated random walks
189 (CRWs) as a framework to measure differences in movement patterns. CRWs account for the angular

190correlations in animal trajectories coming from local scanning behavior and are widely used to 191describe insect movements (Bartumeus & Levin, 2008; Kareiva & Shigesada, 1983). CRWs can be 192described by two parameters: speed and sinuosity. We first examined speed, comparing the mean moving speed among treatments with different numbers of pairs. We arbitrarily restricted 193194measurements to the first 2 seconds after separation, but our conclusions did not change for longer 195focal durations, at least within 10 seconds. We used linear mixed models (LMM), with the number of 196pairs (as factorial data) treated as a fixed effect and individual identity included as a random 197 intercept. The likelihood ratio test was used to determine the statistical significance of each 198explanatory variable (type II test). In cases of significant effects of time, we ran Tukey's post hoc tests. We then investigated the time development of sinuosity (turning patterns) of termite 199200movements within the same time window. We computed the turning angles as the magnitude of 201changes in the direction of motion from one frame to the next frame. Then, we fit wrapped Cauchy 202distributions to turning angle data using maximum likelihood estimation methods and took the 203distribution's scale parameter as the sinuosity (Bartumeus & Levin, 2008; Mizumoto & Dobata, 2019). 204Depending on the value of the scale parameter, the wrapped Cauchy distribution varies from a 205uniform distribution (scale parameter = 0, maximum sinuosity Brownian walk) to a delta distribution 206 (scale parameter = 1, minimum sinuosity straight walk). We obtained a 95% confidence interval for 207each sinuosity value by resampling the permutated turning angle data set 1,000 times.

209 **2. Results**

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210Termites experienced different dynamics of pair formation across densities (Fig. 2A). As 211density increased, tandem runs were more frequently interrupted and separated (Fig. 2B; Cox hazard; 212Pair: LRT, χ^2_1 = 81.772, *P* < 0.001), while the duration of tandem runs was not different between sexes and no interactions were found between density and sex (Cox hazard; Sex: LRT, $\chi^2_1 = 1.098$, P = 0.295; 213Pair:Sex: $\chi^2_1 = 0.093$, P = 0.76). The median values for tandem running time were 62.0, 48.8, 30.3, and 21421522.4 seconds for the 1, 2, 4, and 8 pair treatments, respectively. There were two different causes for 216separation; spontaneous separation and interruption by other termites (Fig. 2C, Video S1, S2). In the 217case of 1 pair, all separations were spontaneous and presumably accidental as the male lost contact 218with the female (Video S1). With more termites present, the probability of interruption by a third 219party increased, explaining the high separation probability at high densities (Video S2). At high 220density, separated pairs changed partners more frequently (Fig. 2D), and it took longer for separated 221females to find a partner than for separated males (Fig. 2E; Log-rank tests; 1 pair: $\chi^{2}_{1} = 0$, P = 1.0; 2 222pairs: $\chi^2_1 = 0$, P = 0.9; 4 pairs: $\chi^2_1 = 11.7$, P < 0.001; 8 pairs: $\chi^2_1 = 19.3$, P < 0.001).

When termites separated, their headings relative to their separated partner were not uniformly distributed (Rayleigh test; Males, 1 pair: $\overline{R} = 0.191$, P = 0.017; 2 pair: $\overline{R} = 0.562$, P < 0.001; 4 pair: $\overline{R} = 0.468$, P < 0.001; 8 pair: $\overline{R} = 0.480$, P < 0.001, Females, 1 pair: $\overline{R} = 0.586$, P < 0.001; 2 pair: $\overline{R} = 226$ 0.519, P < 0.001; 4 pair: $\overline{R} = 0.435$, P < 0.001; 8 pair: $\overline{R} = 0.440$, P < 0.001). The peak of the distribution was near the opposite direction from the separated partner's location, indicating that in most case females and males moved away from each other just after a separation event (Fig. 3).



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230Figure 2. The dynamics of termite pair formation across different densities. (A) Experimental arena with different numbers of termites. (B) Duration of tandem running until separation across 233different densities. Tandem pairs were separated sooner with increasing density. Shaded regions 234indicate 95% confidence intervals. (C) Two types of separation events: spontaneous separation 235(above) and interruption by another individual (below). In the 1 pair condition, all separations 236were necessarily spontaneous, while interruption by the third party was common in high-density 237conditions (Video S1, S2). (D) The probability of changing to a new tandem partner after each 238separation event. In the 1 pair condition, there was no chance to change partner. (E) Comparison 239of the time to find a partner after separation. At high density, males found a partner faster than 240females. Asterisks indicate significant differences between sexes (P < 0.05, log-rank test).



242 **Figure 3.** The distributions of relative orientation to the stray partner after separation. Zero radians 243 indicates movement toward the stray partner, π radians indicates movement in the opposite 245 direction.

247After separation, males sped up their movement, while females slowed down (Fig. 4A, Fig. S1), 248as reported in two other termite species, Coptotermes formosanus and Reticulitermes speratus 249(Mizumoto and Dobata 2019). However, the acceleration was slower when only a single female and a 250male were present (Fig. 4AB, Fig. S1). When we compared the movement speed just after separation, 251the speed of males in the 1-pair condition was lower than in the other conditions (Fig. 4B; LMM; χ^2_3 = 14.585, P = 0.002). On the other hand, the speed of females just after separation was not different 252253between conditions (Fig. 4B; LMM; $\chi^2_3 = 0.066 P = 0.996$). Also, male movement became more sinuous 254just after separation, but soon returned to the lower sinuosity seen before separation (Fig. 5AB, Fig. S2). When we compared the period just after the separation among different densities, we found that 255256sinuosity decreased as the density increased from 2 to 8 pairs. However, males in the 1-pair condition 257also showed less sinuosity (Fig. 5B).



259260Figure 4. Movement speed of termite dealates after separation across different densities. (A) The 261time development of speed in the 1-pair condition and in the multiple-pair (2, 4, and 8) conditions. 262Speed was calculated from the distance traveled in 0.2 seconds. Separation timing was determined 263from the distance to the closest individual, hence termites could change their speed before the 264separation event was detected. Shaded regions indicate mean ± 2S.E. (B) Comparison of moving speed during the 2 seconds just after separation. Bars indicate mean ± 2S.E. Statistical analysis was 265266performed for each sex separately, where different letters indicate a significant difference (P <2670.05; LMM with Tukey's test).

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Figure 5. The sinuosity of termite movements across different densities. (A) The time development of sinuosity in the 1-pair and 8-pair conditions. To obtain the sinuosity, we fit wrapped Cauchy distributions to turning angle data and estimated the scale parameter. Shaded regions indicate 95% confidence intervals obtained by resampling the permutated data set. (B) Comparison of sinuosity across different density conditions and time windows. Bars indicate 95% confidence intervals obtained by resampling the permutated data set.

279 **3.** Simulations

280 **4.1 Methods**

281We developed an individual-based model to examine how the behavioral changes observed in 282males can contribute to mating success. We considered a focal male that has just been separated 283from a female, either when no other individuals are available (Fig. 6A), or when additional potential 284partners are available (Fig. 6D). Based on our observations of the body orientations of separated 285individuals, we assumed that the male and female were heading away from each other in opposite 286directions (Fig. 6A, D: arrows). The focal male starts at a distance d = 20 mm) from the separated 287female, in a periodic boundary condition of size = $L \times L$. For the condition without other individuals, 288we set L as a large value (= 10,000 mm) to represent a virtually unbounded surrounding area without other potential mates. For the high-density condition (corresponding to the 2-, 4-, and 8-pair 289290conditions), we randomly placed additional females and males (n = 1, 3, and 7), and we set L to 124 to 291achieve the same density as the experimental treatment. Two individuals were considered to 292encounter each other when the distance between their centers fell below φ , which was set to the 293value used above to define tandem running (9.75 mm).

294Individuals performed a CRW with speed v and sinuosity ρ , which could vary according to sex, 295density, and time since separation (Table 1). The value of v was set to the empirically measured mean 296speed for the corresponding sex and density. For males, we also assumed that speed depended on 297 time since separation (< 2 sec or > 2 sec), reflecting empirical observations (Fig. 4A, Table 1). Based 298on our behavioral analysis, the length of a time step was set to 0.2 seconds. Thus, each individual 299moved 0.2v mm in each time step. Values of ρ for different sexes and time windows were set to the 300 scale parameter of a wrapped Cauchy distribution fitted to corresponding turning angle data (Table 301 1). We then simulated turning angles by drawing them from a wrapped Cauchy distribution with the

appropriate value of ρ . Specifically, we applied the inversion method (Bartumeus & Levin, 2008), first generating a uniform random number u (0 < $u \le 1$) and then deriving the turning angles θ from the following equation:

$$\theta = 2 \arctan(\frac{1-\rho}{1+\rho} \tan\left(\pi(u-0.5)\right))$$

We initiated the simulation with a random bearing angle that fluctuated according to θ . At each step, the bearing angle was equal to the previous bearing angle plus the deviation θ such that the moving object takes on a new direction correlated with the previous direction, forming a CRW.

We compared the searching efficiency between two different moving speeds observed in the 1-pair (slow at the beginning) and multiple-pair conditions (fast at the beginning) (Fig. 4). In the high-density condition, non-focal individuals moved with the speed of tandem runs. Each simulation ran for 300 seconds (= 1500 time steps). We ran 10,000 simulations and measured search efficiency as the probability for focal individuals to encounter a mating partner. We also measured the time until encounter. The simulation was implemented in Microsoft Visual Studio C++ 2017.

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Table 1. Parameters used in the simulations.

Symbol	Definition	Value(s)	Unit		
Environmental parameters					
d	Distance between separated pair	20	mm		
L	Size of the searching area	10,000 or 124	mm		
φ	Range of encounters	9.75	mm		
n	The number of additional females and males	0, 1, 3, 7			
Speed parameters					
v _{m1}	Males after separation (< 2sec)	$17.05^{*1}, 27.02^{*2}$	mm/sec		
v _{m2}	Males after separation (> 2sec)	29.38	mm/sec		
Vf	Females after separation	6.77	mm/sec		
Vo	Other individuals for multiple pair conditions	12.88	mm/sec		
Sinusousity parameters					
ρ _{m1}	Males after separation (<2 sec)	0.64			
$ ho_{m2}$	Males after separation (>2 sec)	0.73			
ρf ₁	Females after separation (<2 sec)	0.72			
$ ho f_2$	Females after separation (>2 sec)	0.69			
ρο	Other individuals for multiple pair conditions	0.78			

^{*1}1-pair condition; ^{*2}Multiple-pair condition. Parameter values for <2 sec and >2 sec were
 obtained from empirical observations 0-2 seconds after separation and 2-10 seconds after
 separation, respectively.

321 4.2 Results

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In the condition without any other individuals, males that moved slowly, like those in the 1-pair experimental condition, achieved higher encounter rates (Fig. 6B). Here, because a male had no other option than reunion with the stray partner, the time to find a partner was not different between a separated female and a male (Fig. 6C). Interestingly, there was a time lag for males to enjoy the advantage of slow movement. When we look at the period just after the separation (0-2 sec), fast-moving males have slightly higher encounter rates than slow-moving males (Fig. 6B). However, after 2 sec, slow-start males exceed fast-start males even though both move at the same speed (Fig.
6B). This can be interpreted as follows. A fast-start male may quickly encounter the separated female,
but if he does not, he risks moving further away from her. Thus, after 2 seconds, he is likely too far
from the female to have much chance of encountering her. In contrast, a slow-start male can stay
close to the female during the first 2 seconds; when he speeds up after 2 seconds, he can find the
female more efficiently than a fast-start male.

334On the other hand, under high-density conditions, fast-start males, like those in the 335multiple-pairs experimental conditions, achieved higher encounter rates than slow-start males (Fig. 336 6E). Although the advantage of fast males is more substantial at higher density, this result was consistent across the different densities tested in the experiments (Fig. S3). In this scenario, there 337 338were two different encounter patterns: reunion with the stray partner and changing to a new partner. 339Consistent with the 1-pair case, the reunion rate was higher in slower-moving males (Fig. 6E). However, faster-moving males obtained a different partner more efficiently, which led to higher 340 341overall encounter rates (Fig. 6E). The simulation also found that males in the high-density condition 342obtained a partner faster than females, similar to our experimental results (Fig. 6F). 343



Figure 6. Simulated searching efficiency of male movements in two different situations. (A, D) At 345low density (A), only a single pair is present, hence reunion is the only way to find a partner after 346347separation. At high density (D), termites can also change to a new partner. Right after separation, 348the female and male are at a short distance (d); in the high-density condition, there are also other 349individuals randomly located around them. Dotted squares indicate the periodic boundary conditions (size $L \times L$). Filled circles indicate males, while open circles indicate females. Focal 350individuals are black, while others are grey. Arrows indicate the heading direction at the start of 351352the simulation. (B, E) Searching efficiency under the respective conditions. Slow-start and 353fast-start males move at different speeds in the first 2 sec and then use the same high speed. When 354no other pairs are present, slow-start males like those observed in the 1-pair condition achieved 355higher encounter rates than fast-start males (B); under high-density conditions, fast-start males like those observed in the multiple-pair conditions achieved higher encounter rates than 356357slow-start males (E). (C, F) Time to find a partner for each sex. Without other pairs, there is no 358sexual difference (C), while under high density, males obtain a partner faster than females (F). 359Model parameters are given in Table 1. 360

361 **4.** Discussion

362In mate search by C. gestroi, which aggregate on a tree trunk and search locally, densities of 363 potential mates can vary drastically over time. Within the swarming season, different flight events 364result in various population densities according to weather conditions and colony readiness 365(Chouvenc et al., 2017). Even within the same day, the density of potential mate changes according 366to time. The density is the highest just after the dispersal flight and then decreases as successful 367tandem pairs isolate themselves for colony foundation. Therefore, density-dependent behavioral 368 change is crucial for mating success. In particular, when a male termite gets separated from his 369 paired female, he needs to adjust search strategy because of a kind of speed/accuracy tradeoff in 370 efforts to find the stray female (Zimmerman, 2011); high speeds may lead to a quick encounter with the stray partner, but they also increase the risk of moving further away from her (Mizumoto & 371372Dobata, 2019). At very low densities of individuals, this risk is so high that males move slower to 373increase the likelihood of re-encounter with the stray partner. On the other hand, under higher 374densities, the risk of isolation is diluted because another potential partner may be available even if 375reunion fails. Our results show that this tradeoff shapes mate search behavior in termites. Our 376 experiments found that males searching when no other potential mates were present moved slower, 377 while males searching at higher densities moved faster (Fig. 4). Data-based simulations confirm that 378this behavioral change is adaptive; the observed slow movement facilitates reunion, while fast 379movement leads to higher rates of obtaining a new partner (Fig. 6). Thus, the availability of targets 380strongly affects mate search strategy and encounter dynamics.

381In addition to speed, turning patterns may lead to similar effects on encounter dynamics. For 382example, CRWs with high ρ values lead to straighter movements and should have high search efficiency for new partners (Bartumeus et al., 2005), which is similar to fast movement. Thus, parallel 383 to speed differences, one can expect that males show less sinuous movements at high density. This 384385prediction is partly supported; sinuosity decreased as the density increased among 2-, 4-, and 8-pair 386conditions (Fig. 5B). On the other hand, males in the 1-pair condition also showed low sinuosity, 387 similar to males at the highest densities. This finding can be interpreted as follows. First, separated 388 females are sometimes found in the heading direction of males in the 1-pair condition, while they are 389 usually in the opposite direction in multiple-pair conditions (Fig. 3). Thus, excessive sinuosity of 390male movements may decrease encounter efficiency in the 1-pair condition. Second, directional 391memory (i.e., persistence) may prevent individuals from moving very sinuously after separation 392(Bardunias & Su, 2009; Turchin, 1998). In the 1-pair condition, individuals showed less sinuous 393 movements even during tandem runs, probably because there are no obstacles in the arena (Fig. 5). 394Thus, even though males in the 1-pair condition increased their turning angles after separation, their 395sinuosity can still be smaller than in the 2-pair condition. In fact, males in the 1-pair condition 396 decreased ρ to the same extent as in the 2-pair condition, while decreases in the 4- and 8- pair 397 conditions were smaller.

398 The observation that termite males increase their moving speed at high density after 399separation also implies a mate competition process. During mate search, the high density of 400different-sex individuals usually means a high density of same-sex individuals as well. After a 401 tandem run pair get separated, these same-sex individuals may snatch the stray partner before 402reunion. Thus, males need to find a female sooner than competitors for a successful pairing, which 403may be another reason why males at high density increased speed at the expense of the likelihood of 404reunion. Our simulations also demonstrated that the fate of the separated female is affected by the 405male's movement after separation. If the stray male moved more slowly in the high-density condition, 406 this increased the probability of the female encountering a different male before the stray male found a partner (i.e., 24.16% with a slow-moving male; 22.40% with a fast-moving male). Thus, vigorous 407 408males should have an advantage in obtaining a partner when they get separated. This is consistent 409with previous observations that larger males have a higher chance to obtain a partner when multiple 410 males are present (Husseneder & Simms, 2008; Li, Zou, Lei, & Huang, 2013; Matsuura, Kuno, & 411 Nishida, 2002), although it should be noted that various selective pressures can influence the body 412size of termite alates other than mate competition (Chouvenc, 2019; Nalepa, 2011). From the mate

competition perspective, our results demonstrate that movement pattern is a sexually selected trait
in termite mate search (Hartke & Baer, 2011), and vigor of the searching sex reflects both efficient
search strategy and effective domination of same-sex competitors.

416In contrast, females did not change their movement patterns across different densities of 417individuals and thus achieved lower re-encounter rates compared to males at higher densities (Fig. 4182E). In additional simulations focusing on females, we predicted that females should also move faster 419at high mate density to obtain a new partner (Fig. S4). There are two non-exclusive explanations for 420 these contradicting results. First, females of most termite species use pair-bonding pheromones to 421help males detect them (Bordereau & Pasteels, 2011), where fast movement by females may be 422disfavored as it decreases detection rate by males (Mizumoto & Dobata, 2018). In C. gestroi, which 423search for a mate at high density (Fig. 1), the importance of attraction pheromone is relatively low 424compared to other termite species. Actually, the quantity of pheromones produced in the tergal and 425sternal gland of females is too small for males to locate females even from a short distance (e.g., 75 426mm) (Chouvenc et al., 2020; Sillam-Dussès, 2011). However, such a chemical signal may still provide 427some level of information to a searching male, given that a recently-separated female expects to be 428very close to a male (e.g., < 20 mm). Second, searching animals suffer a fundamental 429 speed-perception tradeoff, where high speeds improve their spreading capacity but reduce perceptual 430capabilities (Bartumeus et al., 2016; Benhamou, 1992). Because of this tradeoff, individuals moving at 431high speeds may miss the target upon encounter and require multiple passages before detection. In 432the case of the termite searching process, not every encounter results in tandem running; sometimes 433a female and male just pass by each other. Pausing behavior, which is often observed in 434partner-searchers (Alpern, 1995; Franks et al., 2010; Mizumoto & Dobata, 2019) and ambush 435predators (Scharf & Ovadia, 2006; Wearmouth et al., 2014), can function to ensure successful 436encounters.

437Males in the multiple-pair conditions increase their speed even before separation, while males 438in the one-pair condition increase speed only after separation (Fig. 3A). This difference may reflect 439our criterion for separation, which we judged to occur when the distance between the male and 440 female exceeded a threshold (9.75 mm = $1.3 \times \text{body length}$). Thus, males in multiple-pair conditions 441may be more sensitive to separation and change their behavior even when the distance to the partner 442is smaller than the threshold. The proximate mechanisms for this behavioral change can be related to 443the tandem pair's encounters with other individuals, which are more common at high densities and 444often lead to separation (Fig. 2B, Video S2). First, males may detect the interrupting male upon 445separation, and the presence of this competitor may be the cue to change their behavior. Second, 446males can estimate the density of surrounding individuals from the number of separation events they 447experience. In multiple-pair conditions, frequent interruptions lead males to experience many 448separation events, which can inform them that conspecific density is high. Thus they become ready 449to move fast as soon as they detect separation, which they do with greater sensitivity than is captured 450by our threshold. Similar density estimation mechanisms are also used in other animals. For example, 451ants use encounter rates to estimate the density of individuals in the nest, an important cue for 452collective decision making (Pratt, 2005). Given that there is no clear difference in males' moving 453speed among the 2-, 4-, and 8-pair conditions, termites' density estimation is not quantitative, but 454rather a binary evaluation of the presence of competitors.

In general, availability of resources, including distributions and density of targets, strongly 455456affects optimal search strategy and actual animal movements (Bartumeus et al., 2016; Viswanathan 457et al., 2011). In both foraging and mate search, searchers increase search effort in areas with a high density of targets; yet interestingly, the types of targets affect the patterns of behavioral change. 458459Foragers often exhibit slow and sinuous movement in high-density areas (Banks, 1957; Murdie & 460Hassell, 1973; Weimerskirch et al., 2007), which is an efficient random search strategy considering 461energy intake and perception accuracy (Benhamou, 1992). On the other hand, in this study, we 462showed that termite males increase their moving speed under a high density of individuals, which is 463 adaptive in increasing encounter rates in a short period. The main difference between foraging and 464mate search is the value of a target. Foragers collect as many targets as possible given the prevailing

- 465 costs and benefits (Abe & Shimada, 2015), while termite mate searchers seek only one partner but
- 466 must do so within a time limit, after which they die (Mizumoto et al., 2017). Clarifying the motivation 467 of searchers, combined with search theory, is key to understanding the movement patterns of
- 468 animals.
- 469

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477 Authors' contributions

- NM and TC conceived and designed the study. NM performed the experiments. NM and AR collected
 the data from videos. NM performed data analysis and computer simulations. NM drafted the
 manuscript. SCP and TC edited the manuscript. All authors gave final approval for publication.
- 481

482 **Competing Interests**

- 483 The authors declare no competing interests.
- 484

485 Data Availability Statement

- 486 Data and source code associated with this manuscript will be available from the Dryad Digital
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