

Cooperative Extension Service
College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources
University of Hawai'i at Manoa

Insect Pests
May 2004
IP-16



Identifying the Little Fire Ant A New Invasive Species on Kaua'i

Hawai'i Ant Group; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Hawai'i Department of Agriculture (HDOA), Plant Pest Control Branch; University of Hawai'i, Pacific Cooperative Studies Unit and Department of Plant and Environmental Protection Sciences, College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources; Kaua'i Invasive Species Committee (KISC)

We are in the process of eradicating an infestation of the **little fire ant** (LFA) in the Kalihiwai area of Kaua'i. We need the help of everyone on Kaua'i to report any ants they find that match this ant's description. *With your help, we can keep Kaua'i LFA-free.*

Background

Since 1999 when it was first collected at Hawaiian Paradise Park in the Puna area on Hawai'i, over 30 LFA infestations have been found on the Big Island. Containment actions are being taken, but limited resources and personnel, and pesticide label use restrictions, have made it difficult to eradicate all the infestations there.

Beginning in 1999, HDOA has enforced quarantine regulations to prevent shipment of infested potted plants from the Big Island. However, at least one infestation at Kalihiwai on Kaua'i apparently was started from such a shipment before the quarantine, and there may be others that have yet to be reported. No infestations are known on any other islands in the state.

Identification and distribution

Little fire ant's scientific name is *Wasmannia auropunctata* (Roger) (Hymenoptera: Formicidae).

- Little fire ants are tiny— $\frac{1}{16}$ inch long—pale orange, and slow moving.
- They are found in South America, the West Indies, warmer regions of Mexico, West Africa, Galapagos Islands, New Caledonia, and the Solomon Islands.
- In the USA, in addition to its presence in Hawai'i, the little fire ant is common in southern Florida.



- Its sting produces large, painful, raised, red welts.
- Irritation from the sting lasts several days, aching painfully at first and later itching intensely in spells.
- Although not quick to sting when handled, the LFA will do so if trapped beneath clothing.
- LFA may also sting animals (livestock, pets, wildlife).

Not to be confused with the tropical fire ant

The tropical fire ant, *Solenopsis geminata*, is a stinging red ant common in Hawai'i.

- Tropical fire ants are 2–3 times longer than LFA: $\frac{1}{8}$ – $\frac{1}{4}$ inch (3–6 mm).
- Tropical fire ants will have a few larger workers with large, square-shaped heads.
- LFA workers are all the same size, about as long as a penny is thick.

Tropical fire ant ("red ant")



Little fire ant

Help keep Kaua'i free of little fire ants!

If you think you have LFA on your property on Kaua'i,

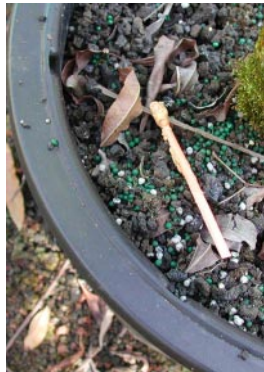
please call HDOA in Lihue at 274-3069. **Do not apply** any toxic baits or insecticides until HDOA or KISC personnel survey the infestation. They can advise you on how best to control or eradicate the ant infestation. Hydramethylnon-based granular ant bait has been successfully used to contain or eradicate some LFA infestations on the Big Island.

Checking for presence of the little fire ant

1. Smear a *very thin* coat of peanut butter on one end of a wooden chopstick (which can be painted day-glo orange for ease of locating).



2. Place the chopstick with peanut butter in an area where you see ants, preferably in the shade, at the base of a tree, etc.; leave it out for about 1 hour.



In a pot



Near a shadehouse

3. Pick up the chopstick very carefully to avoid dislodging ants, and examine the ants on the peanut butter.

- Are they orange or red?
- Are they no bigger than $\frac{1}{16}$ inch?

If you can answer Yes to *both* questions, then you *may* have little fire ants.



Put the chopstick with the ants into a zip-top bag. Write your name, location, and phone number on the bag. Place the bag into the freezer overnight to kill the ants.

4. Drop off or mail the ants for identification to: Hawai'i Dept. of Agriculture Plant Pest Control Branch (Attn: Craig Kaneshige) 4398A Pua Loke St. Lihue, HI 96766-1673 Phone number: 274-3069.



5. It is *very important* that you do not apply any toxic ant bait or spray at the site until the location is mapped and the ant is identified by HDOA. Doing so will suppress the ants and make it more difficult to map them before control efforts are started.



For more information, please visit these websites:

Hawai'i Department of Agriculture—<http://www.hawaiiag.org/hdoa/npa/npa99-02-lfireant.pdf>

Hawai'i Ant Group—<http://hbs.bishopmuseum.org/ants>

Kaua'i Invasive Species Committee—<http://www.hear.org/KISC/index.html>

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