

# Browsing ants

*Lepisiota frauenfeldi*



Browsing ants are an exotic invasive species not commonly found in Australia. They are considered to be a significant threat to our environment, economy and agriculture industries.

These ants originated in southern Europe and are distributed through north Africa, and south west and south east Asia, including Timor Leste and Guam.

Browsing ants can form multi-queened, super colonies. Worker ants, with a reproductive queen, can move and form dense populations in new and often harsh environments.

They eat or displace native ant species, as well as other insects, spiders, centipedes and crustaceans.

Browsing ants also protect and 'farm' sap-sucking insects such as scales, mealybugs and aphids, increasing their populations on native plants, resulting in decreased plant health or premature plant death.

## Legal requirements

Browsing ants are not a prohibited or restricted invasive species under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*, however everyone has a general biosecurity obligation (GBO) to take reasonable and practical measures to minimise the biosecurity risks associated with invasive animals under their control.



Queensland  
Government

At a local level, each local government must have a biosecurity plan that covers invasive animals in its area. This plan may include actions to be taken on browsing ants. Some of these actions may be required under local laws. Contact your local government for more information.

## Description

Adult browsing ants have a slender body approximately 3–4 mm in length and are a uniform, shiny dark brown in colour. The thorax has a strong middle constriction and a pair of dorsal hairs. Legs and antennae are very long in comparison with the body. Workers all look the same.

Browsing ants have no functional sting or venom and are not harmful to humans. They run about in a crazy or haphazard manner when disturbed and spray formic acid as a defence mechanism or to subdue prey.

## Life cycle

Very little is known about the biology of browsing ants. Colonies have up to 5000 workers and several queens, nesting in the soil on dry habitats. Reproductive phenology and foraging activity have been studied in field and laboratory conditions in Western Australia and are still ongoing.

## Methods of spread

Browsing ants can be easily moved in a variety of ways if not checked and treated before moving between locations, including between states or territories.

They can be moved in items such as pallets, equipment, shipping containers, caravans, trailers, mobile homes, boats and yachts.

## Habitat and distribution

Browsing ants were detected at the Port of Brisbane on April 2019. In response, Biosecurity Queensland, with support from the Australian government, implemented an eradication program to destroy the infestation.

Browsing ants were first detected in Australia at the Perth airport in 2013. They were also been found in the Northern Territory in 2015. Nationally cost-shared eradication programs were activated in both locations to respond to these detections.

Browsing ants are ideally suited to Australian conditions. They are known to nest in very dry areas, where they make loose nests, often in sand patches or under logs, sheets of tin, footpath edges and curbing or in piles of rubble.

They will also nest in rubbish, scrap metal, timber, power boxes, soil, mulch, hay, fertiliser and other plant material. Similar to other invasive ants, nests have been found in power boxes and the species shows an affinity for electrical components.

## Surveillance

Biosecurity Queensland's browsing ant surveillance team uses lures, observation and odour detection dogs for surveillance.

Lures consist of syrup or sausage in specimen jars placed on the ground around 5 m apart, alternating between the two attractants. Lures are placed and then collected after one hour which allows enough time for the ants to attract to the lures.

Trained officers perform a visual inspection to look for and sample any suspect ants.

Ant diagnosis is confirmed by an entomologist using a compound microscope.

Trained odour detection dogs have also been deployed in the surveillance effort. They can detect browsing ants even when there is no visible sign of a nest. The dogs are also used to confirm if treatment for control of ants, at previously infested sites, has been successful.

## Prevention and early detection

Similar to other invasive ants, populations of browsing ants can increase rapidly. If you see unusual increase of dark slender ants around your property, call Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 13.

## More information

For more information contact your local government or visit [biosecurity.qld.gov.au](http://biosecurity.qld.gov.au).



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