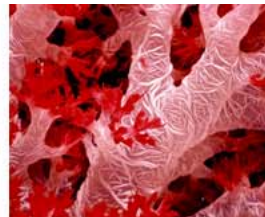


The feral big-headed ant

Recognizing big-headed ants and their nests

Big-headed Ant Project
March 2006



Project background

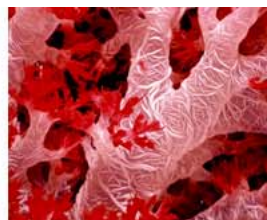


The Threatened Species Network is a community-based program of the Australian Government and WWF-Australia.

The Big-headed Ant Project was initiated by TSN to raise local awareness about these feral ants and their impacts, and to try to limit their spread in Alice Springs.

The project has involved:

- ☐ Town Council
- ☐ Territory Housing
- ☐ Industry and Business
- ☐ Schools
- ☐ Community groups
- ☐ Residents

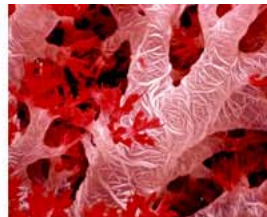


Where did they come from?



Magnified image of the two worker sizes of big-headed ants. Not to scale

- **Big-headed ants are thought to have arrived in Alice Springs during the early 1990's.**
- **They were translocated along with items such as nursery supplies, equipment and furniture from Darwin and the Eastern seaboard.**
- **Their numbers in Alice Springs are growing, but there is still a real chance at containing their numbers and spread.**

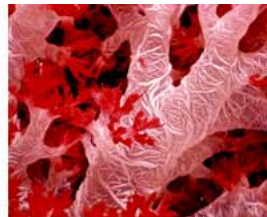


Why are big-headed ants a problem for Alice Springs?



The Threatened Species Network is a community-based program of the Australian Government and WWF-Australia.

- **Big-headed ants impact on native ant populations, and will kill all native ants in a badly infested area.**
- **They invade housing and cause damage by chewing through electrical wiring and tile grout.**



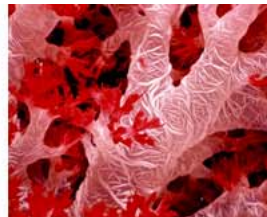
Why conserve native ant diversity?

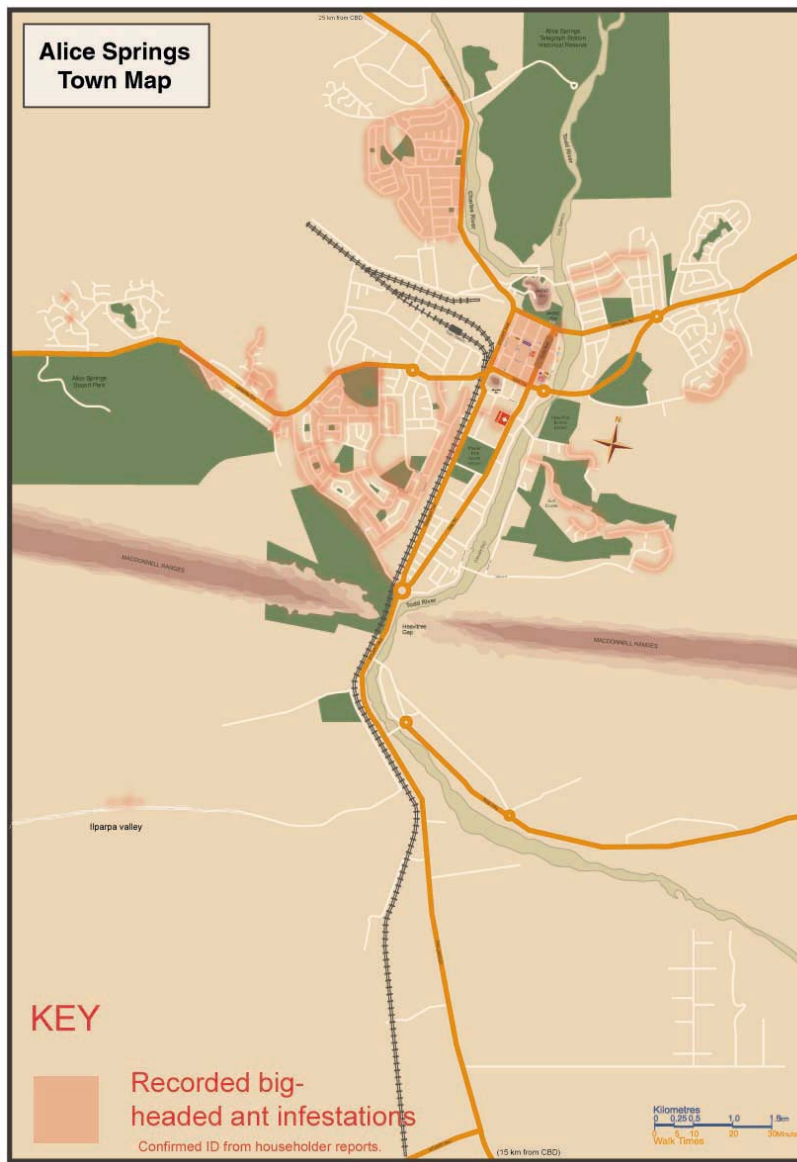


The Threatened Species Network is a community-based program of the Australian Government and WWF-Australia.

It is important to conserve native ant diversity in Alice Springs. Central Australia has a very large number of native ant species, all of which play a role in ecosystem function. Among other things, they assist with:

- Seed dispersal
- Soil aeration
- Nutrient and detritus breakdown
- Pollination





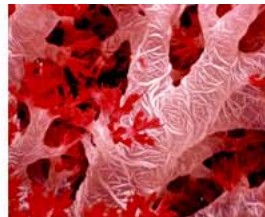
The Threatened Species Network is a community-based program of the Australian Government and WWF-Australia.

Mapping the distribution of big headed ants.

One of the project aims was to develop an understanding of where the ants were established in Alice Springs.

Information was gathered by:

- Backyard survey forms
- Residents bringing in samples for identification.

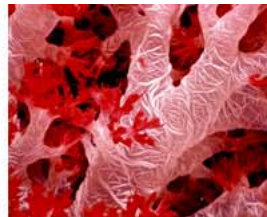


Identifying big-headed ants



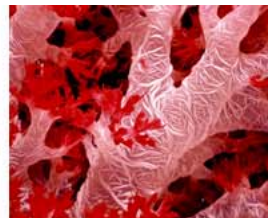
The Threatened Species Network is a community-based program of the Australian Government and WWF-Australia.

- There are two sizes of workers in big-headed ant colonies. Both are very small, and light brown to dark reddish brown.
- Big-headed ants move slowly in comparison to many native ants, such as the common black ant.



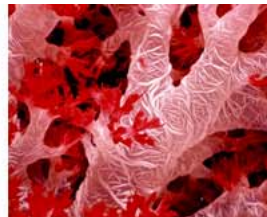
1. Minor workers

The minor workers (2-3mm) form the majority of the ant population. They do not have large heads, and are slightly smaller than the common black ant.



2. Major workers

The major workers (3-4mm) are larger than the minor workers, and have a disproportionately large head. They make up roughly one in every hundred ants.

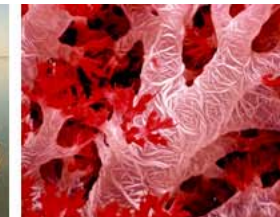


Identifying big-headed ant nests

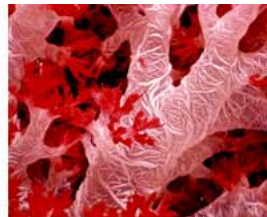


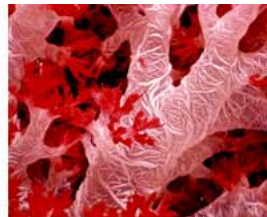
The Threatened Species Network is a community-based program of the Australian Government and WWF-Australia.

- Big-headed ants nests are generally not raised, unlike elaborate structures that native ants make.
- Nests can be at dripper outlets or in pot-plants, as these ants need a source of moisture for their survival.
- Big-headed ants often nest in between pavers or cracks in concrete and in tile grout.
- Nests also occur inside houses - in kitchens, bathrooms and laundry areas. Nests have also been found inside wall cavities.



Big-headed ant nest



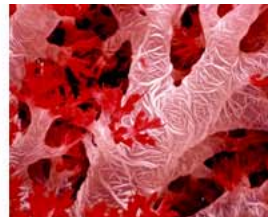


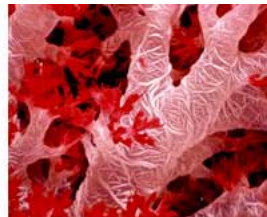


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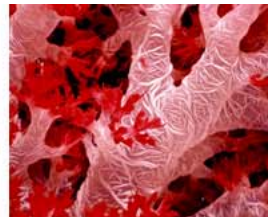


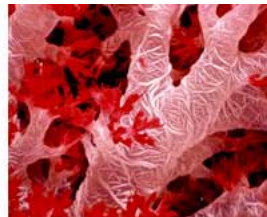
Big-headed ant nests

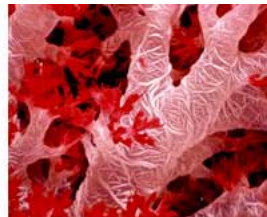




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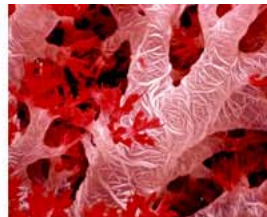


Nests in lawns



The Threatened Species Network is a community-based program of the Australian Government and WWF-Australia.

- Big-headed ants also make nests in lawns.



Some native ant nests for comparison



The Threatened Species Network is a community-based program of the Australian Government and WWF-Australia.

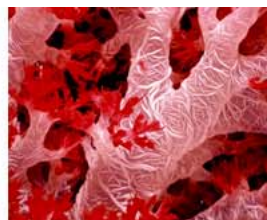
**Bull or Inch Ant
(*Myrmecia desertorum*)**



**Spiny Seed
Ant
(*Pheidole* sp)**



**Desert Ant
(*Melophorus* sp)**

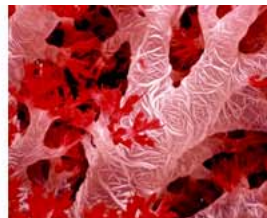


What you can do.



The Threatened Species Network is a community-based program of the Australian Government and WWF-Australia.

- Help control big-headed ant infestations by preventing their spread through movement of infected pot plants, gardening supplies and in household items.
- Monitor ant nests and get any suspect ants or nests identified.
- Treat confirmed infestations and try to coordinate treatment with neighbouring properties to reduce chances of re-infestation.
- Try to reduce the amount of water used on gardens. Big-headed ants thrive in moist environments, and will be attracted to well watered gardens and parks.





Threatened
Species
Network



Australian Government



The Threatened Species Network is a community-based program of the Australian Government and WWF-Australia.

For more information contact the Big-headed Ant Project:

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C/- The Arid Lands Environment
Centre.

PO Box 2796
Alice Springs, NT 0871
Australia

Tel: (08) 8952 1541
Fax: (08) 8953 2988
rangelands@wwf.org.au

Or your Land For Wildlife / Garden For Wildlife coordinator on ph: 8955 5222 or lfw@lowecol.com.au

Acknowledgements

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Images sourced from the University of Nebraska website and the TSN CSIRO big-headed ant poster.



Northern Territory Government

Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts

