

Yellow Crazy Ants

in North and Far North Queensland

ABOUT YELLOW CRAZY ANTS

Yellow crazy ants are a highly aggressive tramp ant that were first discovered in Queensland in 2001. In a suitable climate, such as North and Far North Queensland, they can form “super colonies” that cover vast areas. They do not bite, but spray formic acid to blind and kill their prey.

Yellow crazy ants are one of the world’s worst invasive alien species. Once established super colonies, they swarm aggressively and destroy entire ecosystems, killing most other invertebrates and small animals. Yellow crazy ants have been observed to silence entire forests, and each super-colony can host hundreds if not thousands of queens.

SCALE OF INVASIONS

Right now the major outbreaks of yellow crazy ants in northern Queensland are currently centred in the Cairns and Townsville regions. Satellite outbreaks have also occurred on Hamilton Island, thought to have spread from the Townsville infestation.

Other major outbreaks of yellow crazy ants have occurred on Christmas Island, in Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory and in areas around Brisbane.



THE OLDEST RAINFORESTS ON EARTH AT RISK

The highest risk incursions of yellow crazy ants on the Mainland are centred in North and Far North Queensland. The Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, one of Australia’s most premier tourist attractions, contains some of the oldest rainforests on earth. These rainforests are biodiversity hotspots containing plants and animals that occur nowhere else on earth.

These forests are the perfect breeding ground for yellow crazy ants. If left to spread, they would decimate the native wildlife in and around the world heritage and transform the ecosystem from the ground up.

HOMES AND FARMS INVADED

If established in Queensland, yellow crazy ants will severely impact local communities, farms and other industries, reduce local amenity and decimate native biodiversity. In a 2019 study the social and economic costs of yellow crazy ants were estimated to be \$513 million over 30 years.

CURRENT MANAGEMENT IN NORTHERN QUEENSLAND

Cairns region

The Wet Tropics Management Authority (WTMA) operates a successful YCA eradication program, funded jointly by the Australian and Queensland Government, however the latest three-year funding commitment is due to finish in June 2022. Existing eradication programs are making headway in containing and eradicating yellow crazy ants around Cairns, but have an uncertain future due to insecure funding. If funding is not continued, it would undo the important gains made to date in eradicating the infestation around Cairns.

Townsville region

Infestations around Townsville are severe and require urgent intervention to control and eradicate them. Unlike Cairns, there is no dedicated program with Commonwealth or state government funding support. Townsville City Council are tasked with controlling and eradicating yellow crazy ants, but do not have the resources necessary to do this. Outbreaks at Shute Harbour and Hamilton Island in the Whitsundays, premier tourist destinations, were detected in the last two years, likely to have spread from the Townsville infestations.

The Townsville infestations are close to areas of high conservation significance, including about 8km from the southern end of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and less than 5km from the Mt Elliot section of Bowling Green Bay National Park, an area of exceptional species endemism. If yellow crazy ants were to establish in the Mt Elliot region they would likely spell the extinction for a number of ground-dwelling endemic species found nowhere else on earth.

Townsville will be the source of ongoing incursions and spread throughout the region, unless acted upon. The impacts on industry, communities and the environment will be severe without concerted effort to control and eradicate yellow crazy ants.



John Tann



Frank Teodo

FUNDING NEEDS

Cairns program

\$6 million per year, over 6 years

Townsville program

\$3.2 million per year over 6 years

For both the Cairns and Townsville programs we are seeking a joint Australian and Queensland Government investment in controlling and eradicating yellow crazy ants, noting the impacts on matters of national and state environmental significance as well as on the regional economy and local communities.