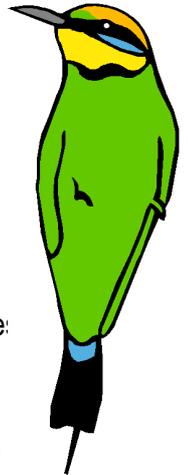


GARDEN FOR WILDLIFE

Termites in your Garden... 'Friend or Foe'?

By

Dave Billington (owner of Red Centre Pest Control and fully licensed technician)



This all depends on what species they are and what you are trying to protect. Termites have been around long before us, but you know that already, so let's educate you on some things about termites that you may not know. This is a very brief overview and I have tried not to get too technical. In Alice Springs and surrounds and up to the Tropic of Capricorn some 30 km north we have four species (excluding grass eating species) of termites that we deal with. They can be categorised into 'aggressive' and 'non-aggressive' species of which there are two of each.

Aggressive: Coptotermes Ssp and Schedorhinotermes Ssp

Non- Aggressive: Nasutitermes Ssp and Heterotermes Ssp (in saying this, these species will still devour 'timber in service' i.e. houses etc if left untreated but they are very slow and prefer rotting timbers, mulch, bark and loose timber on the ground. On the odd occasion when they have attacked houses the damage was very minimal)

Grass eating species eat mainly spinifex and make those hard mounds on the ground which you see when you drive into rural areas and around town. **(Don't kill yourself trying to dig them up or poisoning them as it really is a waste of time.)** They are only doing what comes naturally and are no threat to your property unless you have a grass farm.

Copto's and Schedo's (pronounced *shedo's*) are the number one damaging termites in this area for houses, sheds, pergolas and almost any other timber product which is placed in contact with the ground. They usually have large amounts of termite mud (reddish-brown in this area) associated with their workings and nests.

Copto's usually make their nests in the root crowns of large trees and favour gums and peppercorns but are not limited to these trees. They have one queen and are noticeable by a mud pack around the base of the tree or where a limb has been removed and the end has been mudded up. In the case of young nests however there is sometimes no outward sign of the nest.

Schedo's on the other hand can make 'sub' nests spread over a large area and usually establish nests underground which makes them hard to spot. They usually then pop up under pallets and loose timber and sub floors etc.

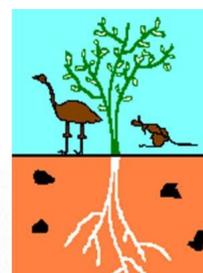
Nasuti's are small slow and have black brittle mud (looks like its burnt) associated with their workings and often these workings are seen on top of the ground with black tubes running everywhere.



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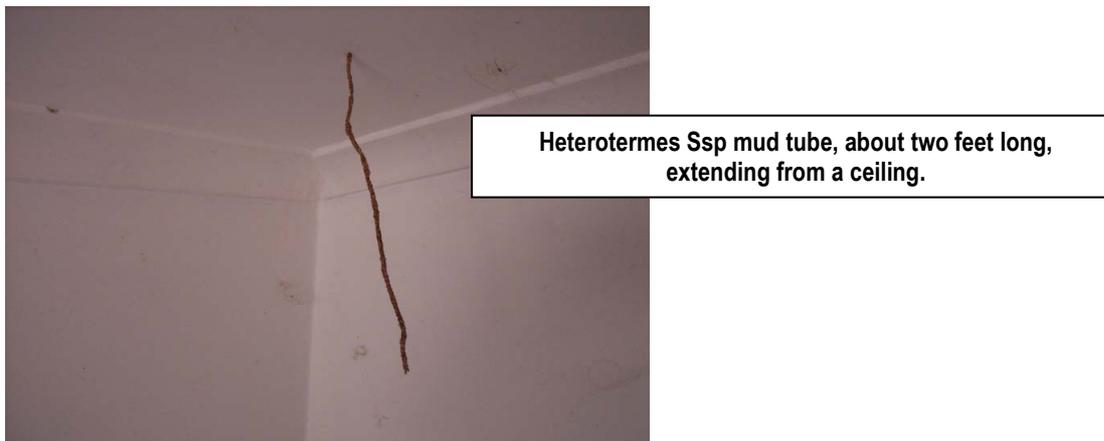
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Low Ecological Services



Hetero's are also slow and are known for their thin brown mud tubes that usually come up about 2 feet from the ground up trees and other structures. They are also known for coming out of walls and ceilings in mid air as shown in this picture in an Ilparpa house.



As bad as this might look this species cause very little damage in most cases and are simply foraging for food.

Treatments

Most pest controller's eyes light up at the word termite treatment because it usually means they can now get that extension on their house that their partner has been on at them about for some time. At Red Centre Pest Control we try to limit the costs as much as possible by firstly trying to eliminate the labour intensive treatments that so many of our competitors enjoy doing. Unless there is no other alternative

we prefer not to drill holes in floors and concrete and put moats full of repellent chemicals around properties.

This is 'old school' and used to be referred to as a 'barrier' treatment. This is costly, looks terrible when holes have to be drilled and is difficult to predict at what point it 'wears out'. Another downside of 'old school' treatments is they are often using toxic smelly chemicals that kill just about everything (including the pest controller by the time they are 50). The old adage that 'if it doesn't smell it doesn't work' is just that, old.

If this type of treatment is unavoidable there are environmentally friendly chemicals available that actually cause colony elimination once termites come in contact with it rather than trying to keep them out and only killing a few while the colony makes more replacements.

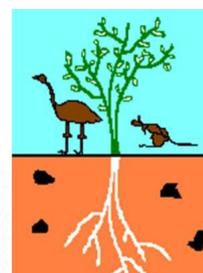
Bait boxing on trees is a waste of time and money as this method is not even recommended by the manufacturer of the bait box. The reason for this is simple, termites are fickle. If the tree has a hole drilled into it and then a box full of bait is placed over the hole then there is nothing stopping the termites from mudding up the drilled hole from inside the tree and never going into the box. In the event they happen to go into the box then in most cases the bait is consumed before colony elimination is achieved, unless the technician returns to refill the box before the termites vacate. This is also a 'one off' treatment that doesn't protect the tree from future attack. The cost of this method is usually in the hundreds of dollars and in most cases will fail.

Direct treatments on large trees done by Red Centre Pest Control are self contained within the tree have no effect on other animals, achieves colony elimination within 2 weeks, saves the tree, lasts for up to 8 years and requires no further maintenance. They also have techniques for direct treatment of buildings and small shrubs to protect them from termites which are also long lasting a very cost effective. Red Centre Pest Control also use the 'Green Termite Baiting System' for long term protection of buildings. Services are provided throughout Alice Springs, up to Tennant Creek and up to the Barkley. Red Centre Pest Control are a family owned and operated business. For more information or to make a booking, see the website (specific to the Alice Springs area) at www.redcentrepestcontrol.com or email sales@redcentrepestcontrol.com or call on 08- 8953 5562.

This article was provided by Dave Billington in response to a request to provide more information on termites and termite control in your back yard and GfW thank him for his independent article. Termites play an important and complex role in nutrient recycling, aeration of soil and providing food for numerous geckos, skinks and dragons as well as birds and native mice. Additional information is available in your GfW/LfW information pack or reference books listed there. Extensive information is also available on the web by Googling the termite names used in Dave's article.



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