



CSIRO Centre for Arid Zone Research and the Northern Territory Threatened Species Network (TSN) have combined forces in a joint project to raise public awareness and gather information about the introduced Big Headed Ant (*Phedole megacephala*) in Alice Springs.

What is a Big Headed Ant?



Big-Headed Ant



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Most Big Headed Ants don't have big heads!!

Big Headed Ants are light brown to dark reddish brown, and have two sizes of workers. One size is 3mm long, has an enormous head and is sometimes called a seed cracker worker. The numerous minor workers are 2mm long and do not have enlarged heads but can be recognized by the shape of their heads, which narrow abruptly behind the eyes.

Big Headed Ants can be found nesting in the soil around homes in many areas of Alice Springs. The ants are often found around drippers or in the bottom of pot plants as they are a water loving species.

Nests are found in exposed soil or under cover and in rotting wood. They form nests in soil with a low mound of loose dirt around the centre. The colonies are very active and this makes the nests highly visible. They rarely nest indoors, but may invade homes to forage for food.

Why are they a problem?

The big headed ant is an introduced species in Alice Springs which poses a serious threat to local invertebrate communities as it reduces native insects severely, especially our ants, with which it comes in contact. A reduction in the number and type of our native ants is likely to have a major impact on the ecological services that native ants provide which include soil aeration, pollination and seed dispersal.

Invasive species (weeds pests and diseases) represent the biggest threat to our biodiversity after habitat loss.

Big Headed Ant Mapping Project

We are looking for schools in Alice Springs who are interested in incorporating this activity into their Science Week plans.

We will provide:

1. Fact sheet and ID kit on Big Headed Ants
2. Pro forma data sheets and survey instructions
3. GIS computer map database with instructions for collation of class/school data
1. Suggested ant- and invertebrate- focused classroom activities that could be linked to the mapping project
2. Approximately 1hr training workshop for teachers

You will need to:

1. Attend the training workshop.
2. Set up the Big Headed Ant Mapping activity as a class/school project
3. Undertake a school grounds survey to give students practise in collecting data
4. Ask students to spend 1 to 2 hours on a warm sunny day searching their home yards for ants and ant nests and filling out data sheets.
5. Guide students to enter the data into the GIS map database.

For more information please contact Karen Eva-Stirk on 08 8950 7123.



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