

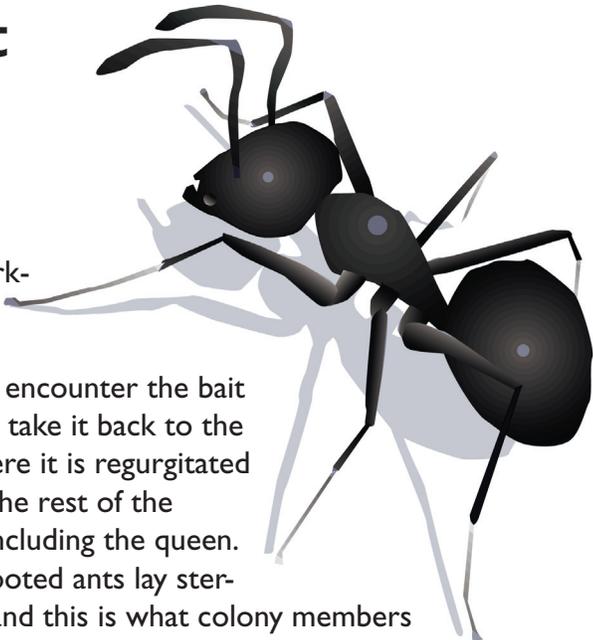
# The White-Footed Black Ant

By Chris Cavanagh

Some people have called it an epidemic. Some feel it is akin to a horror movie. It has frustrated and perplexed pest control technicians and reduced little old ladies to tears. If you live anywhere from Orlando south to the Keys and have not experienced it, it maybe coming soon to your neighborhood. I'm referring to the dreaded white-footed ant (*technomyrmex-albipes*).

This ant, which is likely a native of Asia that migrated to Hawaii on plant material and soon made it's way to South Florida, was first identified in Homestead, Florida in 1986. It has made a slow progression north each year, becoming a common problem in Dade and Broward counties a few years ago. Now Palm Beach County has been inundated and there have been sightings of the ants as far north as Orlando. About an eighth of an inch long, the ants are dark black with white coloring at the base of their legs. They march in tight formation in long columns that sometimes branch out in several directions. Although they do not bite, sting, or cause any damage, they can be a terrible nuisance mainly because of their enormous population. Colonies can have up to three million members while most ant species are limited to several hundred thousand. About half the colony of white-footed ants are fertile males and females, allowing for quick expansion. Other ants have only one or just a few queens per nest. In addition, white-footed ants often have a primary colony and several satellite or sub-colonies. These subcolonies are formed when the ants swarm (winged males and females fly to new areas) or through budding (a huge number of adults split off and crawl to a new colony). Most ants do one or the other, while the white-footed ant does both to expand their population.

All of these factors make control of this insect extremely difficult for homeowners and pest control technicians alike. Perhaps the biggest obstacle, though, is the fact that regular baiting methods will not eliminate the colony as they can with other ants. Most ants



have workers that forage for food, encounter the bait and then take it back to the nest where it is regurgitated to feed the rest of the colony, including the queen. White-footed ants lay sterile eggs and this is what colony members in the nest eat. While the bait will kill the worker, it will never get back to the queen. It is rare that white-footed ants can be totally eliminated both in and around a structure, but control can be achieved. A pest control company must be brought in for this problem. The best treatment strategy is a power spraying of the perimeter on bushes, shrubs, trees and palm fronds. Since the white-footed ants are sweet feeding ants, they are often found on shrubs and ornamentals where honeydew producing insects, like scale and aphids, are found as well. Many times nesting sites are located at the tops of palm trees or in the bark of trees. They can also be found trailing under the eaves of homes where they can enter the attic. These areas must be treated and the attic may have to be fogged. A thorough inside crack and crevice service may be needed, especially if the ants have found their way inside. It is typical for homeowners to have to continuously vacuum up thousands of dead ants that have died because of crossing the chemical barrier. Even though baits will not eliminate the colony, such baits as Terro and Maxforce granules, when put out in large amounts by the pest control technician, can greatly reduce the ant population. Some other tips for homeowners when battling these persistent ants are to trim back any foliage away from the house by at least a foot, caulk all possible openings, clear any fallen leaves and compost which may provide a food source and nesting site, and keep all products containing sugar in an airtight container or bag. Good luck!