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## Electric ant (little fire ant)

Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, Western Australia

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# Electric ant (little fire ant)

DPIRD-175

The electric ant (*Wasmannia auropunctata*), also known as little fire ant, is a tiny, gold-brown coloured ant, and one of the world's most invasive pests. Electric ants prey on and compete with other insects and can displace large numbers of native animals, ants, and other insects.

They affect human health and lifestyle, can inflict painful stings on humans and wild and domestic animals, can blind pets, damage the environment, and have the potential to severely affect agricultural industries.

The electric ant is native to Central and South America and was first detected in Australia in 2006 in Queensland, where there are localised incursions. It is an introduced invasive ant species that is of great concern for Western Australia (WA).

Electric ants are a declared pest that is prohibited in WA under the *Biosecurity and Agriculture Management (BAM) Act 2007*.



Image 1: Electric ant

## Reporting

**Electric ants are a reportable pest in Western Australia.**

Report suspected electric ants immediately to our Pest and Disease Information Service (PADIS) —

- call +61 8 9368 3080
- [email PADIS](mailto:padis@dpiird.wa.gov.au)  
([padis@dpiird.wa.gov.au](mailto:padis@dpiird.wa.gov.au)).

Alternatively, report suspected electric ants using our free MyPestReporter app, available on the website at [dpiird.wa.gov.au](http://dpiird.wa.gov.au).



## Description

- Tiny, about 1.5 mm long.
- Gold-brown coloured.
- Usually slow-moving.
- Social ant that forms foraging lines.



**Image 2: Electric ants on food, with finger to indicate scale. Photo – courtesy Biosecurity Queensland®**

## Similar species

Pennant, marauder, and coastal brown ants.

## Where to look

- Establish colonies anywhere rather than having visible nests.
- Under stones, blocks, sleepers, logs, and in garden waste, leaf litter, soil, trees, around swimming pools, watercourses.
- In houses in wall cavities, clothing, bedding, garden equipment, camping gear.
- Wet and dry conditions.
- Can survive in water, and may sting you when swimming.

## Potential impact

### Environmental

- Can out-compete and displace other ant species.
- Can cause declines in numbers of invertebrates and small vertebrates and, in the long term, infestations reduce biodiversity.
- Thought to have reduced reptile populations in New Caledonia and tortoise populations in Galapagos Archipelago, where ants eat hatchlings and attack eyes and cloacae of adult tortoises.

### Economic

- Electric ants collect honeydew from sap-sucking insects and protect them from other predators. This can result in agricultural farms experiencing dieback and reduction in crop yield through reduced plant vigour and the spread of crop diseases, such as sooty mould. In addition to production losses, direct production costs could be increased by additional insecticide and fungicide treatment required.
- Some countries have had a significant loss in tourism, as the ant's painful sting discourages outdoor recreational activities.

### Social

- Inflict painful stings on humans that cause painful, itchy, persistent pimples and, occasionally severe allergic reactions.
- May sting, and possibly blind, domestic pets.
- Dense infestations may leave backyards and swimming pools unusable.
- May invade houses.

## Distribution

Localised incursions detected in Queensland.

## Report

If you suspect invasive pests (such as electric ants), email photographs and a description to [padis@dpird.wa.gov.au](mailto:padis@dpird.wa.gov.au) or call +61 8 9368 3080 for advice. Alternatively, use our free MyPestGuide Reporter app or online tool, on the website at [dpird.wa.gov.au](http://dpird.wa.gov.au).

## More information

Refer to the department website at [dpird.wa.gov.au](http://dpird.wa.gov.au) for more information about the following:

- Invasive ants
- Pest ants
- Pest and Disease Information Service (PaDIS)
- *Biosecurity and Agriculture Management (BAM) Act 2007*

## Contact us

### Pest and Disease Information Service (PaDIS)

+61 8 9368 3080 | [Email PaDIS](mailto:padis@dpird.wa.gov.au) ([padis@dpird.wa.gov.au](mailto:padis@dpird.wa.gov.au))

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