

TOM RASBERRY



For more information, photos  
and help with identification,  
please visit

<http://urbanentomology.tamu.edu>



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TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE

# Raspberry Crazy Ant

## A new exotic species invading Texas



SANFORD PORTER

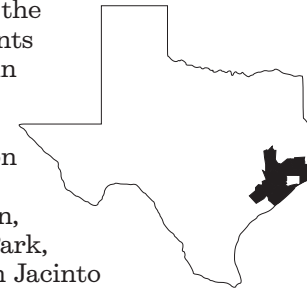
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## Raspberry Crazy Ants

In 2002, Tom Rasberry, a professional pest-management provider from Pearland, discovered a population of a new pest ant near Pasadena, Texas, in Harris County. Huge numbers of this new ant literally covered the landscape in industrial parks and residences. The Center for Urban and Structural Entomology within the Department of Entomology at Texas A&M University has identified the ant as a new exotic invasive pest in Texas, but the species' identification and country of origin are still unresolved. It is now commonly called the Raspberry crazy ant, *Paratrechina* sp. nr. *pubens*. Currently, little is known regarding the biology of this ant. The ant population has begun to spread, often through human assistance.

### Where are they found?

High numbers of the Raspberry crazy ants have been found in localized spot infestations in southeast Houston (Harris County), including Houston, Pasadena, Deer Park, Friendswood, San Jacinto Port, Pearland, Seabrook and La Porte. As of December 2008, localized infestations have also been confirmed in areas of Brazoria, Fort Bend, Galveston, Hardin, Jefferson, Liberty, Montgomery, Orange, Walker and Wharton counties. New infestations are suspected beyond these areas.



This ant has the potential to spread well beyond its current range in coastal Texas, to possibly include the southern half of Texas and the southeastern U.S. However, it is a semi-tropical ant and high populations will likely be limited by cooler weather conditions.

These ants can be transported through movement of almost any infested container or material. Thus, the movement of garbage, yard debris, bags or loads of compost or bales of hay by car, truck, railroad or airplane can transport ant colonies and result in new areas of infestation.

### What do they do?

In infested areas around the Houston area, large numbers of Raspberry crazy ants have caused great annoyance to residents and businesses. Because one multi-queen colony can number in the millions, ants can blanket the ground and trees, creating uncomfortable situations that prevent residents from enjoying time outdoors. Pets and livestock may avoid the outdoors due to the constantly crawling crazy ants. Although these ants do not have stingers, worker ants possess a structure called an acidopore on the end of their abdomen which can excrete chemicals for defense or attack. The Raspberry crazy ants are capable of biting, and their bite causes a relatively sharp pain that quickly fades.

Raspberry crazy ants have been found accumulating in large numbers in electrical equipment, causing short circuits and equipment failure. In some documented cases, the ants have caused tens of thousands of dollars in damage and remedial costs. Critical electrical and computer systems in traffic signals, businesses, schools, hospitals and airports could be affected.

Todd Staples, Commissioner of Agriculture, suspects the Raspberry crazy ant to be a potentially serious agricultural pest. However, no information is yet available on potential crop yields or economic effects in infested lands.



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Accumulations in electrical equipment cause short circuits and equipment failure.

## What effect do they have on wildlife?

Wildlife such as nesting songbirds are irritated by the Raspberry crazy ants. Masses of crazy ants covering the ground and trees likely affect ground and tree-nesting birds and other small animals, and cause wildlife to move out of the area.

The ants are even displacing red imported fire ants in areas of heavy infestation. *However, after experiencing the Raspberry crazy ant, most residents prefer the fire ant.*

A related species of crazy ant has been a serious pest in South America, reportedly displacing all other ant species. In addition, the South American crazy ant pest caused chickens to die of asphyxia due to ants obstructing their nasal passages. Larger animals, such as cattle, have been attacked around the eyes, nasal area and hooves.

### Very little is currently known about the wildlife impact from Raspberry crazy ants.

If you observe any effect on wildlife, please report it to Texas Parks and Wildlife Department by submitting the "Wildlife Impact Report" form found at <http://urbanentomology.tamu.edu>



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## Identifying characteristics and behavior

Until better control methods are developed, you can help control Raspberry crazy ants by identifying colonies and discouraging the ants from nesting on your property.

Raspberry crazy ants:

- Are about 1/8-inch long and reddish-brown.
- Are social insects that live in large colonies containing many queen ants, worker ants and brood consisting of larval and pupal stages. Colony size can be in the thousands, infesting entire subdivisions, industrial sites, agricultural operations, parks and wildlife habitats.
- Do not construct hills or mounds like fire ants, and do not emerge to the surface from underground nests through central openings. Instead, colonies can be found under or within almost any object or void, including piles of debris, stumps, fallen logs, leaf litter, soil, concrete, rocks or potted plants.
- Primarily form nests outdoors, but can roam indoors from outdoor nests.
- Form loose foraging trails as well as forage randomly (non-trailing) and crawl rapidly and erratically (hence the description "crazy" ant).
- Eat almost anything. Worker ants commonly "tend" sucking hemipterous insects such as aphids, scale insects, whiteflies, mealybugs, and others that excrete a sugary (carbohydrate) liquid called "honeydew." Worker crazy ants are also attracted to nectar-rich parts of plants including nectaries, damaged and overripe fruit, and consume other insects and small vertebrates for protein.
- Are hard to spot during cooler winter months. In spring, foraging activity begins and colonies grow, producing millions of workers that increase dramatically by mid-summer (July-August). Ant numbers remain high through fall (October-November).

**Proper identification of Raspberry crazy ants by a specialist is essential.** If you are a pest-control operator or landowner and you suspect you have seen these ants, please

### SUBMIT A SAMPLE FOR IDENTIFICATION

by the Center for Urban and Structural Entomology. Visit <http://urbanentomology.tamu.edu> for an "Identification Request Form" and instructions on submitting ants for identification.

## What can you do to prevent and control them?

The best way to prevent a Raspberry crazy ant infestation is to be "ant-aware."

- Report suspicious ant problems, and have the ants identified by a specialist.
- Avoid bringing ant-infested articles onto your property. Carefully inspect new plant materials, mulch or soil brought onto your property.
- If Raspberry crazy ants are detected, practice good sanitization techniques by removing potential nesting sites, such as piles of debris (mulch, wood etc.) from around buildings, or stacks of debris from the property.



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Many of the typical control tactics that work for other ants do not provide adequate control of the Raspberry crazy ant. Raspberry crazy ant workers are not attracted to most bait products used for the fire ant and other ants. Because colonies predominantly nest outdoors, indoor treatments are not effective in controlling ants that venture inside structures.

However, there are treatments available that offer temporary "buffer zones" around homes and other structures in urban areas. These products must be applied by a licensed applicator only and are not readily available

to the consumer. There are currently no licensed or effective treatments that can be used around livestock or wildlife habitats.

If you suspect your house or property is infested with Raspberry crazy ants, call a professional pest-control provider. These experienced, licensed professionals can offer successful alternatives that are unavailable to consumers. After treatment, or when making multiple applications over time, piles of dead ants must be swept or moved out of the area in order to treat the surface(s) underneath, being careful not to sweep or blow away a treated surface such as soil.