The Common Black Ant - *Lasius niger*

Lasius niger, the Common Black Ant is a very common pest whose life cycle is mainly spent outside. Nests are usually found in damp soil under flagstones, air bricks, with an average number of ants per nest of 15-20,000. Sandy soils are especially attractive to this ant.

When a nest is close to a house, food shop, hospital ward, a worker ant will find a rich harvest of foods and soon there will be a line of ants trailing to and from the nest to the food. Workers travel long distances following scent trails left by themselves or sister ants. When they have found food they communicate the fact by tapping their colleagues with their antennae.

Lasius niger feed on a variety of substances, they will kill and devour small flies and similar insects, will visit flowers for nectar and collect seeds and can "farm" aphids to collect the sugary excretions they produce.

Life Cycle

Over-wintering female adults or queens lay eggs in the Spring. The white legless larvae hatch 3-4 weeks later and are fed by the queen on secretions from her salivary glands until they are fully grown when they will pupate, forming the well known "ant eggs" and then adult workers. These sterile female "workers" take on foraging duties and tend subsequent broods.

Sexual forms are not produced until later on in the year. The entire life cycle takes about two months to complete and the ant “nest” may last for several years.

Workers also enlarge the nest and make galleries and earth cells; they tend and clean the grubs and queen. If danger threatens they move them to safety. Worker ants can carry pupae, which are nearly as large as themselves.

In Summer, sexual forms are produced in large numbers; males are bigger than the workers and the females larger still, up to 15mm and a mid-brown colour. Both sexes possess transparent wings. They emerge from the nest on the same day and mate as they fly in all directions, hence complaints of “flying ants”. These swarms involve numbers of ants and persist for 2-3 hours.

After the nuptial flight the males die and the females lose their wings and over-winter in an earth cell until the next Spring where a new colony commences. Colonies are rarely found with more than one queen. She is the vital centre of the nest which gradually dies if she is removed.

Treatment of Infestation

If the ants' nest can be located outside, this can be drenched with a suitable insecticide. Ants' nests are usually within 20ft of a building.

If the nest cannot be located spray along runs, thresholds, door and window frames, pipe entries, air bricks and other possible routes of entry. Spray between flagstones, along wall angles. Dust formulations are most effective.

Also spray interior wall junctions along which the ants are foraging. The objective is to create an insecticidal barrier between the ants' nest and the food source. Hygiene improvements within the affected area will contribute to lessening the food attraction to the ant.

Black Ants can also nest indoors in cavity walls and under internal flagstones. Use dust formulation in cracks and crevices in addition to spraying insecticide.

A commercially available, ready to use bait can be used against the Black Ant. Several drops of the liquid bait are placed in a suitable bait station and located as close as possible to the nest site, but in a location where they will not be disturbed. It is important to emphasise the requirement for good standards of cleaning to the client, to reduce the availability of alternative food sources to foraging workers, and therefore encourage feeding from the bait stations.