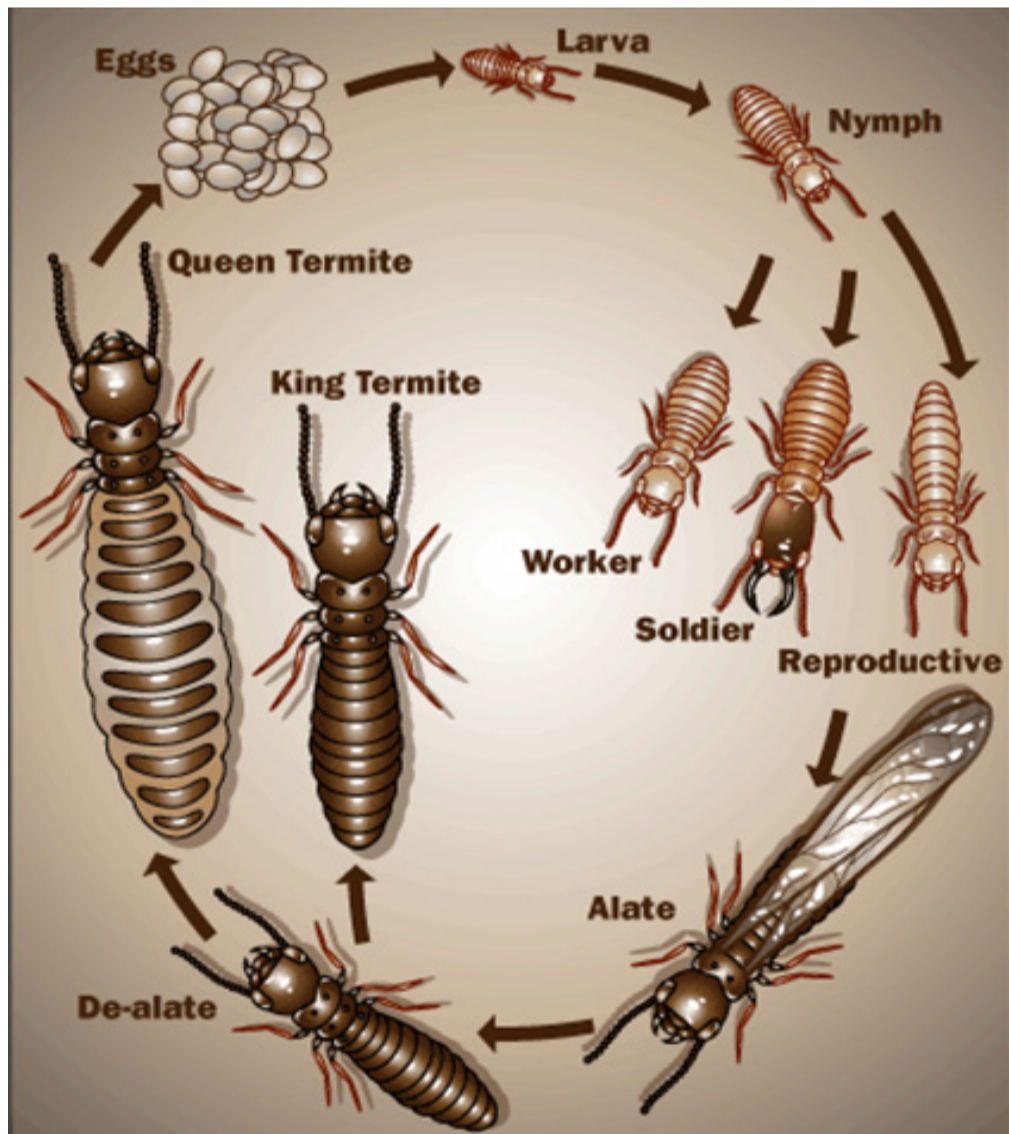


The Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF) under its mandate and national obligation has taken charge for the containment and control of Asian Subterranean Termite (AST) infestation and also put in place measures to prevent the spread of AST from the Lautoka and Labasa districts to other parts of Fiji. Under a government gazetted “Emergency Declaration”, the Lautoka and Labasa districts are recognized as biosecurity emergency areas for AST.

BAF would like to notify all Fijians residing in and around the Lautoka and Labasa districts that the termite swarming season (September to November) is soon approaching and there will be visibility of more termites than usual. People living in districts neighboring Lautoka and Labasa should also be mindful of this. Swarming occurs every year and the public residing in the AST infested areas are advised to remain calm and take heed of the information and directions provided through this 2-part article. In this first part of the 2-part series, we will look at the different castes of termites, why and when do termites swarm as well as what flying termites look like including differences between flying ants and flying termites.

Termite swarms mark the start of termite season. A termite colony is split into groups known as castes. Each caste has a particular role in the colony. The 3 castes of a termite colony are “workers”, “soldiers” and “alates”. Out of all the termite castes, it is only the alates which can fly, being the only ones that are able to develop wings. These are the only termites which are sexually developed and are the future kings and queens of the next season’s termite colonies. The flying patterns and habits of termites are known as swarms.



©2007 HowStuffWorks

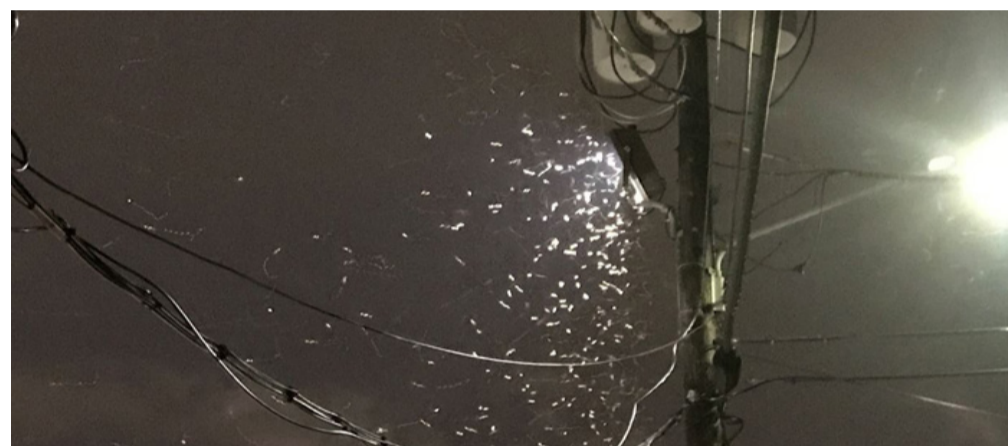
Why do termites swarm?

Termites swarm to breed and start new colonies. A termite swarm marks the beginning of the termite life cycle. During this period, the sexually developed male and female winged termites leave their nests and take flight. This is often referred to as ‘nuptial flight’. After leaving their nest, the winged termites congregate in the air (swarms) and mate with termites of the same species from other colonies. After they have successfully mated, the termites land, shed their wings and start the process of creating a new colony.

When do termites swarm?

AST in Fiji have been observed to normally swarm during September to November period (swarms may start appearing in mid-August during some years). Winged termites are highly attracted to sources of light such as street lamps and can often be found swarming around these sources. Termites aren’t very good fliers and generally rely on the wind to help with air mileage.

Because of this, termite swarms don’t last long, and can be found close to the originating nests. However, if the wind is strong the future king and queen termites will often travel far before beginning the process of starting a new colony. Therefore, one of the ways to prevent new areas being colonized is to kill the termite swarms and prevent them from establishing new colonies.



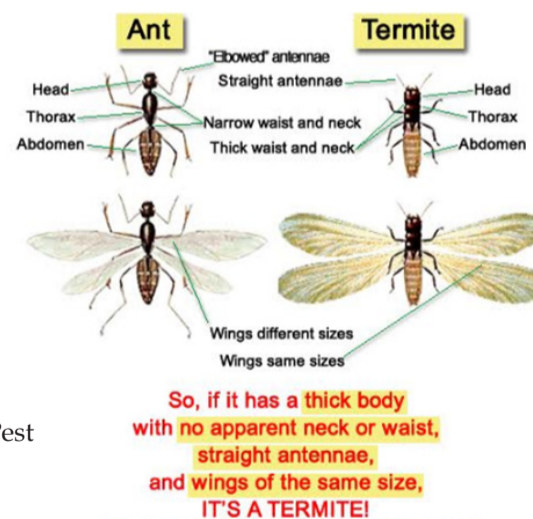
A termite swarm attracted to light

What does a flying termite look like?

Flying termites differ in appearance from other flying insects and can be identified by examining them closely. They have two antennae which are often straight with a slight curve and have two sets of wings which are equal in length and white and translucent in color with vein like structures. Termites, in general, can be defined by their body shape. Both flying termites and wingless termites have a thick body made up of one part. Termites do not have a constriction between their thorax and abdomen like ants do.

What is the difference between a Flying Termite and a Flying Ant?

Ants and termites often get confused with one another to the untrained eye. There have been many instances where termites have been dismissed as white ants. In reality, there is no such thing as white ants, and they are, in fact, termites. Flying termites and flying ants are no exceptions to the matter. Both insects are similar in shape, size and color.



© 2016 Regional Pest Management

In next week’s article, we will look at what the public should do when they see termite swarms and also how to check homes for termite infestation.

For Further Information, Please Contact:

Biosecurity Authority of Fiji on 3312512 or Short Codes: General Enquiries - 5994, Termites - 5996, Giant Invasive Iguana (GII) - 5995, Animal Disease Surveillance - 5997 or email info@baf.com.fj, visit BAF website www.baf.com.fj