

Termites

Giant termite

Mastotermes darwiniensis

Other minor species such as *Coptotermes spp.*

Distribution

Giant termite damages cane only in the Lower Burdekin in sandy or sandy loam soil. Other termite species are found in all canegrowing areas.

Damage

Termites hollow out germinating setts, causing poor strike (Photo 1). They hollow out standing cane stalks over the whole length from below ground to the growing point. This leaves only a shell which may show few outer signs of damage.

Description

Adult termites may be workers, soldiers or breeders (Photo 2). Giant termite workers are white and 10-12 mm long. Soldiers are slightly longer and have powerful mouthparts. Breeders are wingless females (queens) and winged males and females which make new nests. The wingless queens are about 15 mm long. Winged adults have a body length of about 18 mm and including the wings are about 35 mm long.

Biology

Termites form colonies of workers and soldiers. Giant termites are often found in logs and stems of shrub and trunks and branches of dead or living trees, but the real nest is underground. Nests are hard to find as underground tunnels can be 1 m deep and may run more than 100 m from the nest.

Management

In canefields, the only practical control is to remove logs and trees from the edge of fields. No insecticides are registered for termite control in sugarcane. Other smaller species of termites damage cane in small areas, but infestations usually do not persist.



Photo 1: Termite damage.



Photo 2: Termites.