



# Hawaii Invasive Species Council

## “Little Fire Ant Stings Maui”

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The little fire ant (*Wasmannia auropunctata*), the aggressive stinging pest from Central and South America, has been detected on Maui at a time when the Hawaii Department of Agriculture staff on Maui is facing cutbacks. HDOA and DLNR have joined forces with the Maui Invasive Species Committee (MISC) and Maui County to help fill in the gaps and survey for further infestations. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has awarded MISC funding to conduct little fire ant surveys.

“We are losing agency personnel on Maui with the expertise and responsibility for dealing with fire ant invasions,” said Teya Penniman, MISC manager. “We should treat this as an emergency. Time is of the essence. We desperately need to close the massive hole in our inter-island quarantine or we will continue to receive shipments from the Big Island that are infested with coqui frogs and little fire ants.”

Populations of the little fire ant, or LFA, were detected in East Hawaii 10 years ago. A smaller population is also known to exist on Kauai where hazardous terrain hampers efforts to eradicate it. Worldwide, LFA is considered one of the top 100 most damaging invasive species.

“It is continuing to spread on the Big Island,” HDOA Biological Control Section Chief Darcy Oishi said. “It is difficult to detect, so it’s important to get feedback from the public.”

The little fire ant has the ability to drive out insect pollinators, kill birds, blind pets and damage crops, such as macadamia nuts, bananas and coconuts. Mostly arboreal, little fire ant colonies will drop from disturbed tree branches and other vegetation, stinging anything on which it lands, making harvesting,



*The little fire ant is tiny, red-orange in color and slow moving. Found throughout the world in tropical areas, Hawaii is the first urban region infested by the little fire ant, according to Cas Vanderwoude, HDOA invasive ant coordinator.*

—photo courtesy HDOA

picking flowers or pruning dangerous tasks.

“LFA are incredibly scary because they have the ability to become the dominant organism in any system, whether it’s a residential, agricultural, or natural area,” said Entomologist Cynthia King with DLNR’s Division of Forestry & Wildlife, NARS Program. “We don’t want them in Hawaii’s native ecosystems for many of the same reasons we do not want them in

agricultural areas. When present, LFAs fundamentally alter how plants, insects, birds and even humans can interact with, and utilize, the environment.”

If you suspect the presence of LFA, please visit the CTAHR publications Web site for methods of detection and control. Only about 1/16 of an inch in length, the LFA may be easily transported via inter-island shipments of food or nursery crops. Detection is difficult, so the public and landscape industry professionals are encouraged to inspect the roots of potted plants thoroughly.

“Know your plants and soil conditions for a landscape area,” Oishi said. “Check them for pests before you buy, move or plant them.”

Everyone’s help is needed to report further sightings of little fire ants. On Maui, please call the HDOA Plant Quarantine Branch at 873-3962; all other islands may call the state’s toll-free Pest Hotline at 643-PEST(7378).



*Call the Pest Hotline to report invasive pests.*