THE RESPONSE OF THE UP-COUNTRY LIVE WOOD TERMITE (POSTELECTROTERMES MILITARIS DESNEUX (ISOPTERA:KALOTERMITIDAE) TO TERMITE EXTRACTS AND ROOTS OF PLANTS

K. Thirugnanasuntharan and L.D. Amarasinghe
Tea Research Institute, Talawakelle.

The up-country live wood termite is a serious pest of tea in the Maskeliya and Dimbula planting districts. The present knowledge on its biology and migration is scanty. Response of this pest to (a) extracts of termite castes; larvae, workers, soldiers and neotenics; (b) termite frass; (c) seedling tea roots: infested and uninfested; and roots of (d) five tea clones: TRI 2023, TRI 2025, DN, KEN 16/3, N 2; (e) five shade trees: Cassia sp., Erythrina sp., Eucalyptus sp., Grevillea sp., and Haeckia sp., and (f) four grasses: Cymbopogon sp., Eragrostis sp., Tripsacum sp., and Vettiveria sp., were tested in laboratory. The testing materials were used as antibiotic assay, with 10 - 20 replicates. Workers were used to test the response. The responseof the termites was observed at 05, 10, 15, 30, 45 and 60 minutes.

These studies revealed the following:

(a) the soldier extract was the least attractive
(b) termite frass was strongly attractive
(c) infested tea toots were more attractive than uninfested tea roots
(d) the clones TRI 2023 and N2 were less attractive
(e) Eucalyptus sp. was most attractive and Erythrina sp. was least attractive
(f) Vettiveria sp. was more attractive than other grasses

The first five minutes was most crucial in the responses made. These studies also strongly suggest the existence of aggregation/scent trail pheromone in this termite species.

It is envisaged that these findings would help towards better understanding of this pest migration and contribute to its management programme by cultural means. Some of them are: selection of resistant clones, suitable shade tree as diversionary host and appropriate grass for soil rehabilitation.