ROOT THICKNESS AS A CRITERION OF INFESTATION BY THE UP COUNTRY LIVE WOOD TERMITE, POSTELECTROTERMES MILITARIS DESNEUX (ISOPTERA;KALOTERMITIDAE) IN TEA PLANTS AND GRASSES

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Any residual population of the up country live wood termite of tea, Postelectrotermes militaris Desneux, left behind in the field after uprooting of infested tea bushes, has to depend for its survival on the roots of grass used for rehabilitation or on the roots of tea that have escaped clearing out. To study the survival of the termite in these roots, a laboratory experiment was initiated with roots of four types of grasses along with feeder, tiny and small roots of tea. Observations were made at regular intervals up to 120 days on the survival and development of neotenics (supplementary reproductives).

There was a strong positive correlation between the root thickness and survival, as well as potential colony foundation of the termite. Survival was less in feeder and tiny roots of tea and roots of grasses less than 2.0mm in thickness, namely Eragrostis, Mana and Vetiveria. However, in roots of Gautemala grass of 2.25mm thickness, the termite survived better with formation of few neoteincs. In small tea roots (with a mean thickness of 8.5 mm), the termite survived very well and formed many neotenics.

This study signifies the importance of the removal of all roots thicker than 2.0mm and also the selection of suitable grass for rehabilitation, after uprooting the infested tea bushes.