



*Photo courtesy of April Nobile and AntWeb.org.*

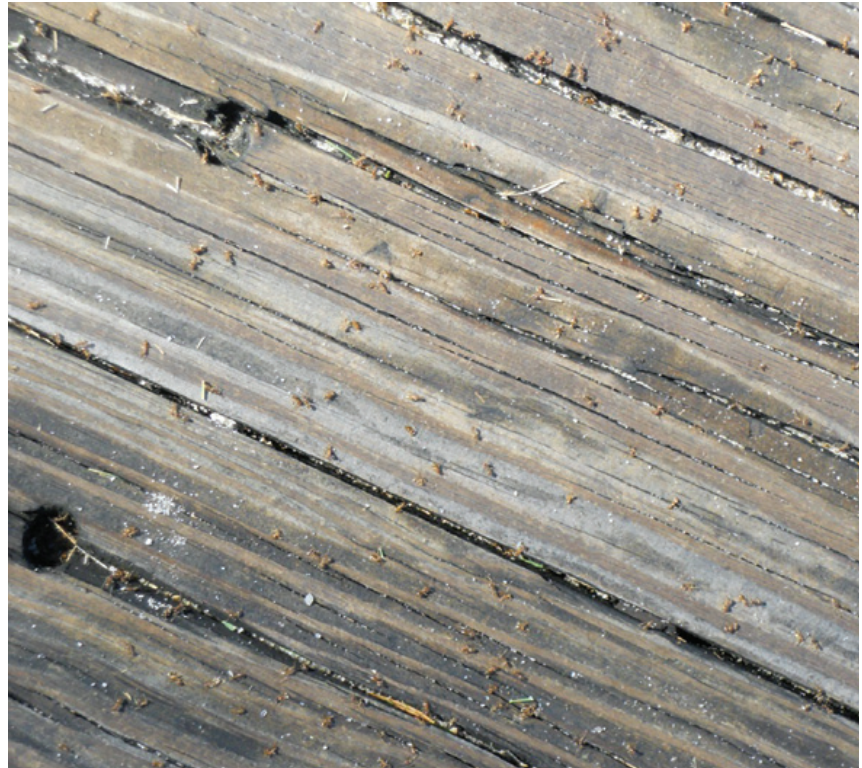
## Caribbean Crazy Ants at Water Crest

by Dennis Cone

**T**he reddish-brown ants are everywhere and are invading communities from Central to Southern Florida. The Caribbean Crazy ant, *Paratrechina pubens*, is an invasive species named for its point of origin and its erratic movement. Once this species infests an area, control is very difficult. Crazy ants build “super colonies,” in which their numbers can be in the hundreds of thousands. Each nest can have multiple queens, and it is not uncommon for separate ant colonies to forage in the same area and even mingle together.

When observing these ants, it is reminiscent of a 1960s science fiction movie. The ants just seem to be taking over. They march along the walkways and cover driveways, fences, tree trunks, shrubbery, and mulch beds. They are everywhere you look, and there is no escaping their presence. Not only is this the seemingly normal behavior for this ant species, but this year the problem is compounded. It might be hard to remember now, with the current balmy temperatures, but Florida had a very cold winter this past year. The cold winter affected and delayed ant activity and reproduction. Once the weather patterns changed to warmer and wetter conditions, the ant populations exploded. The ants had to work overtime to make up for a shorter season. As a result we seem to be dealing with twice as many ants.

The Water Crest community was recently overtaken by these Caribbean Crazy ants. Exterior treatments for the ants were begun, but surrounding natural areas, such as swamps



and nature preserves provided safe havens for reinvading ants. Residents in the neighborhood were frustrated and disgusted when the ants would invade the interior of their homes, following heavy rains. Treatments continued, but the ants still came. J.W. Waite, head of maintenance at Water Crest, says this is a very persistent situation. J.W. has been employed at Water Crest for six years. He tells us, "The ants just appeared out of nowhere. I have had to learn more about ants and patience than I ever wanted to. I have never seen anything like it; everywhere you look there are ants trailing from the preserve area toward our property.

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It seems like whatever gets done to reduce the ants will last for a few days, and then they are right back. I know the pest control company is doing all they can do, but this is an overwhelming situation."

Choosing to consult with outside experts from Bayer and DuPont, the pest control company was able to utilize some new materials and expertise in addressing this ant problem. Treatments with new technologies began and treatment was expanded to create a barrier of at least 30 feet from the buildings, including the treatment of all mulch areas, shrubbery, and tree trunks. Bait stations are being placed immediately adjacent to the conservation areas with the hope that ants will take the bait back to the colonies and greatly reduce their numbers before they can reach the Water Crest buildings. So far with all of these efforts, the amount of ants has been reduced, but elimination of the problem seems unlikely.

Dealing with ants in Florida is nothing new, but this particular ant seems to be the most persistent ant encountered. Caribbean Crazy ants completely take over an area. Once they arrive they will out-forage and out-compete every other ant species, including fire ants, making this the most extreme pest we have had to contend with in recent years.

*Dennis Cone is Florida region operations director for HomeTeam Pest Defense with offices located throughout Florida. For more information, visit [www.pestdefense.com](http://www.pestdefense.com).* ■

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