



Issued in: June 2003

Serial No: 6/03

LIVE-WOOD TERMITES OF LOW GROWN TEA AND THEIR MANAGEMENT*(This Advisory Circular replaces Circular No. 11 and 12, Serial No. 9/71 and 1/76)***1. Introduction**

Live-wood Termites of tea emerged as economically important key pests in the Low-country in the 1960's following rapid increase in area under vegetatively propagated tea clones since their introduction a few years earlier. It was coincidental that the highest yielders of those clones that were used to replant old seedling tea areas, also turned out to be the most susceptible host plants for the two most prevalent species of live-wood termites in the low-country.

On account of their high yield potential, clones TRI 2023 and 2026 became very popular and were therefore the most widely planted. They were also the clones most susceptible to this group of pests, and as a result the impact of termite damage on tea in the low-country was immediately felt. The significance of live-wood termites as a group of primary, and very injurious, pests became apparent within a matter of a few years of large-scale planting of these two clones.

2. Species Attacking Low Grown Tea

The most prevalent species of live-wood termites attacking tea in the low-country are *Glyptotermes dilatatus* and *Neotermes greeni*. The former is commonly referred to as the "Low-country Live-wood Termite" and is the most widely distributed of the two species. It attacks tea from sea level to an elevation of about 1,000 m amsl. *N greeni* is usually encountered in the upper elevations of the low-country and also occasionally in the mid-country. *N greeni* closely resembles the "Up-country Live-wood Termite" which is more or less confined to the Maskeliya and Dimbulla districts. Live-wood termites of the low-country differ from the up-country live-wood termites only in their mode of entry into the host plant, the former entering through dead snags in pruned branches while the latter entering through the roots of the tea bush.

3. Behavioural Pattern

Biology, habits, preference for host plants, and dispersal are fairly similar for the species of low-country live-wood termites, and are described below:

3.1. Dispersal: The winged reproductives of the two sexes pair off and shed their wings in flight during dispersal and alight on suitable host plants. They make their way into the bush through a "soft-spot" on the stem. These "soft-spots" originate as wounds on pruning cuts which have been acted upon by wood rotting organisms to form dead snags. They facilitate easy and fast entry of the termite pair, and the greatest incidence of termite damage is seen to occur in fields that have been pruned 3-4 times without the adoption of sanitary measures.