



John Warner, First Ph.D. Graduate From University of Florida's Fort Lauderdale Research and Education Center, Develops Bait To Stop Troublesome White-Footed Ant

By: Chuck Woods (352) 392-0400 Dec. 5, 2005

FORT LAUDERDALE, FL --- Tiny white-footed ants, which are difficult to control and spreading rapidly throughout Florida and the Southeast, can be stopped with new bait that satisfies the insect's big appetite for sweets, according to a University of Florida entomologist who developed the product.

"A few years ago, these troublesome home invaders were confined largely to South Florida, but now we are seeing them in North Florida, Georgia, Louisiana and South Carolina," said John Warner, an entomologist at University of Florida's Fort Lauderdale Research and Education Center.

"About the size of a gnat, white-footed ants have a voracious appetite for sweet liquids, and our bait caters to their picky palates," he said. "The formula in the synthetic bait precisely mimics nectars and honeydews, which are the ants' preferred food sources."

By combining the bait with various insecticides to attract and destroy ant colonies, Warner has eliminated the need for multiple applications of less-effective insecticides.

"We have tested the bait against many commercial products and found it's the best material for controlling ants as they cannot tell the difference between our bait and their favorite sources of food," he said.

Warner, who is the first student to complete his doctoral degree at UF's Fort Lauderdale center, has patented his bait under the NecDew trademark. UF's Office of Technology Licensing is seeking a commercial firm to market the product.

Unable to attend classes at UF's main campus in Gainesville, Warner started taking graduate level courses in 2000 at the Fort Lauderdale center when he worked for a commercial pest control company in Boca Raton. He began research on ants and other pests with Rudi Scheffrahn, a professor of

entomology at the center, which is part of UF's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. At the same time, Warner also started his own company, Shalom Pest Control.

Warner said the white-footed ant - *Technomyrmex albipes* - was first identified in Homestead, Fla., in 1986 and is an exotic import first collected from Indonesia. The ant probably found its way into Florida via shipping containers or imported plants. Named for their yellowish-white forelegs, the dark-bodied ants prefer to live in trees and shrubs, but they also build nests in walls and attics and under roof shingles.

White-footed ants do not bite, sting or cause any known structural damage, but their colonies are large, foraging far and wide for new food sources. Main colonies that can have two to three million ants are frequently interconnected with smaller satellite colonies.

"Because of their appetite for sweet liquids, they show up at food sources in large numbers, which makes it easy to track their foraging trails to and from the colony," Warner said.

White-footed ants are very difficult to control with residual sprays that stop cockroaches, termites and other household pests. And the ant cannot be controlled effectively with most traditional ant baits.