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Deadly fire ants spreading across Australia – 22nd January 2024

Level 4

Australia's nature is under threat from one of the world's most invasive species – the red fire ant. The tiny ant comes from South America, but has spread worldwide. It causes huge damage to plants and kills native insects and animals, including livestock. The ant's venomous sting can cause allergic reactions in humans. It can be deadly. The government called the ants a "super-pest" which causes serious environmental harm.

Red fire ants have been in Australia since 2001. Australia's Invasive Species Council (ISC) says the ants are spreading because of recent floods. The ISC said: "Fire ants are more active before or after rainfall and can form large floating rafts, which move with water currents to establish footholds in new areas." It warned that the ants will reach "every corner of Australia" if the current outbreak is not controlled.

Level 5

Australia's ecosystems are under threat from one of the world's most invasive species – the red fire ant. The tiny ant is native to South America, but has spread worldwide. It causes huge damage to crops and farms. It also kills indigenous insects and other animals, including livestock. The ant's painful and venomous sting can cause allergic reactions in humans. It is deadly and can cause fatal anaphylactic shock. The Minister for Agriculture called the ants a "super-pest, which cause serious social, economic and environmental harm".

Red fire ants were first found in Australia in 2001. They were only in the state of Queensland, until now. Australia's Invasive Species Council (ISC) says the ants are spreading because of flood waters. They are clinging to each other to create "rafts" on the water. An ISC statement said: "Fire ants are more active before or after rainfall and can form large floating rafts, which move with water currents to establish footholds in new areas." It warned that the fire ants will reach "every corner of Australia" if the current outbreak is not kept in check.

Level 6

Australia's unique ecosystems are under threat from an invasive and deadly species – the red fire ant. The tiny ant is native to South America, but has spread across the globe over the past century. It is one of the world's most invasive creatures. It causes extensive damage to crops and agricultural land. It also kills large numbers of indigenous insects and other animals, including livestock. The ant's painful and venomous sting can cause severe allergic reactions in humans. It can also cause fatal anaphylactic shock. A spokeswoman for the Minister for Agriculture called the fire ants "a terrible invasive super-pest, which cause serious social, economic and environmental harm".

Red fire ants were first detected in Australia in 2001. They have largely been contained within the state of Queensland since then. However, Australia's Invasive Species Council (ISC) says the ants are spreading across the country on flood waters. They are clinging to each other in their tens of thousands to form "rafts" on the storm water. An ISC statement said: "Fire ants are more active before or after rainfall and can form large floating rafts, which move with water currents to establish footholds in new areas." It added: "Our teams are focused on limiting further spread." The ISC warned that the fire ants will reach "every corner of Australia" if the current outbreak is not kept in check.