

Biosecurity Newsletter



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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- No invasive ant species found at Aitutaki Ports 1
- Plants and Seeds smuggled into the country 2
- Giant African Snail (GAS) Baiting Program . 3

No Invasive ant species found at Aitutaki Ports!

The Biosecurity Division has completed the Aitutaki Ant Surveillance Program conducted at Aitutaki Ports.

The surveillance activity commenced on 17 May 2021, for the purposes of confirming the presence of invasive ant species such as the Red imported fire ant (*Solenopsis invicta*) and the Little fire ant (*Wasmannia auropunctata*).

As soon as the team arrived on Aitutaki, they set out to inspect the site in which the survey was to be undertaken.



Above: Biosecurity officers from Rarotonga and Aitutaki preparing the baits.

The preparatory work included the preparation of the ant attraction baits. The 2 types of baits used were the Protein Bait (Peanut Butter & sausage) and the Sugar bait (20% solution of sugar water).

The day following arrival, the work commenced with the placement of the baits. A total of 356 baits were placed within the surveillance area. On collection, ants were secured in bags and placed in the freezer for 48 hours. On the teams return to Rarotonga, these ants were taken into the laboratory for identification.

We are pleased to report that the ant species identified was Pheidole (major and minor workers), and Cardiocondyla, Technomyrmex. These ants are common in the Cook Islands.

The next surveillance activity for Aitutaki Ports will be conducted in the next 12 months.



Above: Biosecurity Officer–Tamarua Teroi working on the extraction of the ant specimens.

Plants and Seeds smuggled into the country!

The Biosecurity team continues to be vigilant in their ongoing inspections of incoming cargo through the mail, fast freight, by air and sea.

On 8 July 2021, our Biosecurity team conducted four inspections on arriving cargo from OLOMANA Voyage 131 at the EXCIL shed (Avatiu Wharf).

One was a crate with personal effects as declared on the manifest. The owner of the consignment, had on a number of occasions, been advised that there is an importation process that must be completed and adhered to, especially with the importation of Seeds/Plants/Plant materials and Soil.

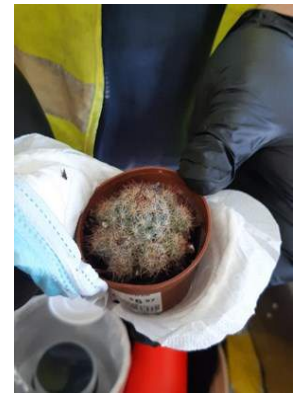
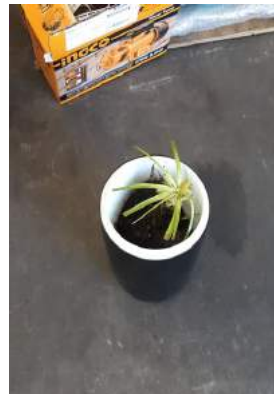


Above: The crate of personal effects that the team is to inspect! Looks normal, I don't see anything odd?!

During the inspection, Biosecurity came across some wrapped clothing, a tightly closed bag and what was thought to be empty cups, as well as a plastic container amongst other goods in the consignment. To the team's disbelief, concealed in these items were seeds, plants, plant materials and soil. These products are not prohibited items but they do carry a significant Biosecurity risk if they are not treated correctly!



Above: Seeds and pot plants that were hidden in this orange bag in shoe box.



On the left: A yogurt maker with an Ornamental plant concealed inside. On the right: A cactus plant hidden inside a cup that was hidden in the pot.



Above: All items seized from this inspection!

Message: Do not smuggle in Seeds/Plants/Plant materials and Soil! Complete the necessary import process. Help us protect our borders, environment, health & livelihoods!!

Giant African Snail (GAS) Baiting Program

The Giant African Snail (*Achatina fulica*), commonly known as GAS, is one of the most damaging snails in the world and can attack a wide range of plants and agricultural crops.

Although snails symbolizes slow movement, the rapidity with which a foraging population can multiply and then decimate crops is disheartening and costly to affected farmers and gardeners.

The purpose of the GAS baiting program is to prevent the unintentional introduction of these snails occurring during the container ships normal scheduled visits to Rarotonga and Aitutaki.

The shipping schedule originates in New Zealand with island hops through the Pacific with Samoa as the last port of call before sailing to Rarotonga. Unfortunately, Samoa who has GAS, is the most risky port for the Cook Islands and is the main reason the Biosecurity team carries out this Giant African Snail Baiting Program.



Above: GAS on the container. This situation occurred some years ago and shows how they can come into the country.

In July 2021, Biosecurity staff carried out a GAS baiting program at Avatiu Ports and Importers biosecurity holding areas.

Using the snail bait “Blitzem”, filled in buckets, the staff would use a handful and spread

(broadcast) on grass areas around the ports and other sites of interest.

The areas of biosecurity interest are the commercial importers.

1. Avatiu Ports
2. Raro Freight
3. Oasis
4. Prime Foods
5. Motor Centre

Biosecurity staff must observe safety while working in these areas and must wear appropriate PPE during any work program.



Above: Senior Biosecurity Officer Sherrromoana Tomoki at the Avatiu Wharf, spreading the bait BLITZEM .

These surveillance programs will continue to be implemented and managed by the Ministry to safeguard our borders from the unintentional introduction of these invasive species.

If you see any of these snails in our country, please contact the Ministry of Agriculture's Biosecurity Division urgently.