

Are Australian insects adapted to bushfires? Aust. Ent. Soc. News Bull. 6:72-73.

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ARE AUSTRALIAN INSECTS ADAPTED TO BUSH FIRES?

Bush fires are generally considered to have been for long part of the Australian scene and many Australian plants are fire-adapted (though I do not recall seeing any discussion on the time period over which they have developed such adaptations). It would seem reasonable that some of our insects also might have developed adaptations to aid their survival in bush fires.

In the hope that members may be willing to pool relevant information in this News Bulletin, I record the rather superficial observations which prompted this train of thought.

When small logs are picked up in the paddock (at Camp Mountain near Brisbane) and within a few hours placed end-on in an indoor open fire, various unidentified species of ants escape from them by running to the end of the log furthest from the fire and thence to the floor.

Recently a stump which had rotted below ground was pulled out and later put base-first into the fire. A large number of ants (*Camponotus* sp.) emerged from holes in the base, but instead of retreating along the stump, they clung with their mandibles in rows

on the side of the base that was away from the flames, and there they remained until scorched to death.

This suggested that, while for ants living within a log that caught fire, the most likely way to survival would be by running away from the heat and leaving the log, for ants living below ground, as *Camponotus* usually do, it would be safer to remain at the side of the nest furthest from the heat. Perhaps this distinctive behaviour of *Camponotus* is an adaptation to bush fires.

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