



The Avicultural Society of New South Wales (ASNSW)

(Founding in 1940 as the Parrot & African Lovebird Society of Australia)

Sustainable Termite Harvesting

(ASNSW Meeting - February 2014)

Presented by Joshua Allen

I am going to talk about sustainable termite harvesting and how you can use them in aviaries and wildlife parks. I will talk about how we use them at Featherdale Wildlife Park where I work and in my aviaries at home. I think that the original idea actually came from the Perth Zoo where they use them for their numbats. We have modified it a little to suit our needs at Featherdale.

Equipment and method

- Shovel
- Mattock
- Black box
- Black bag
- Wood cut to size
- Brush
- Bucket
- Water



1. We use a black box with holes drilled in the bottom of it.
2. We fill it up with wood.
3. We put a bit of water in with the wood just to dampen it a little bit.
4. Then we put a black garbage bag over the top.



We take the top off a termite mound out in the bush and put the black box on the top, and we leave it there for about six weeks or so depending on whether it has rained on not.



Then lastly we just put some leaf litter and scrub over the top so that no one sees it and disturbs it in any way. After about six weeks you will get a fairly big tub full of termites out of the box. You can just tap them out of the fence posts that you put in the box and fill up the tub with them.



Ways to feed them out

One way is to put water in a bigger tub and then put the tub of termites in the middle of that so that they don't get out.



We also use PVC piping which we fill with the termites and screw to the top of the aviary.



Questions and discussion

How does the PVC piping work?

We get the piping from a hardwood store. We fill it with termites and meal worms. It has got lots and lots of little holes up the top and they just fall out one by one slowly onto the ground and the birds eat them up gradually.

Is there a preference in relation to the termites for using black?

Yes. It is supposed to make it darker in there for them. They like it to be dark.

So you don't dig the box down into the ground, you just place it on the top of the termite mound?

No you don't dig it into the ground; you just dig a little bit away from the top of the termite mound and sit the box on top.

You just cut up old fence palings to a size that will fit into the box and then after six weeks you can take the palings out one by one and dust the termites off with a brush.

Normally with infestations in a house the termites seem to prefer soft wood. Fence palings are usually a hardwood, or don't they care?

They eat the hardwood too, just as long as it is not painted or treated.

So you soak the timbers do you before you put them in the box?

No, we don't soak them. We just use enough water in there to dampen the timbers.

Featherdale would need to have quite a big supply of termites, do you have a few boxes set up at a time?

Yes we do. We have about eight set up at the moment and we use about one a week.

I wouldn't have termites anywhere near my house! What is the life cycle of the termites?

I am not too sure but I know that there is a queen that lives right down in the bottom of the mound and she has lots of workers, etc.

Comment

I know that they will go on the fly. We live in the bush and on some nights driving home the air will be filled with winged termites. Males and females match up together and will then follow each other along the ground looking for a suitable cover of timber or bark to crawl under. They will shed their wings before mating and the female will become the queen for the new colony. If they shed their wings and don't find anywhere before sunrise they will die.

You said before that you wouldn't have them anywhere near your house but they can only reproduce after completing the "mating flight" from the actual mounds.

Comment

I had a stack of hardwood fence palings that were loaded with termites. I was so concerned because they were next to the house so I took the palings away down the backyard and left them there for some days while I tried to find out what to do with them. When I came back a few days later they had all gone. I assumed they had gone into the ground or crawled away, but whatever happened they were all gone.

Comment

They had probably been eaten by birds or by black ants. Black ants are a natural enemy of termites. If a termite mound is damaged the termites will very quickly band together and patch up the damage. If black ants get in into the termite mound before the repairs have been completed they are capable annihilating the whole colony.

(After thought: It may be that this is one of the reasons that the black box with fence palings placed on top of the mound works so well. Initially it would be the intent of the termites to hurry to the area to repair the damage to the top of the mound and this would entail them trying to seal off the whole of the black box and plastic bag. Left long enough it would be interesting to see if this is actually what they eventually ended up doing.)

How does the PVC piping work? Why don't they just all fall out or do you have mesh or something inside the pipe?

No. The one in the photo is used for meal worms. It unscrews from the top and we put a whole lot of meal worms in there (about a third of the container) and then they all move around and fall out gradually and not all at once.

The termite mounds that you are talking about are pretty hard to get into. They are almost like rock.

Yes they are. We use a mattock to break into them because we also get big chunks that we take back with us as well. Some mounds are harder than others.

Jack Stunnell

There is no trouble with them getting into your house because I brought them home for 50 years and never had any problems. I used to keep them in big plastic drums.

I would dig the nest out and making sure that I would leave the queen there so that it would build up again. Then I would take it home and put it in plastic drums. I put grease around the top of the drums because termites breathe through their bodies and they won't go across the grease. The grease also keeps the black ants out because they can be a problem.

I used to like to get old palings and cut them up in lengths, soak them in water and then put them on the top. The termites would all come up to get the moisture from the wood of course and then I would tap them out. But of course you don't get enough out when you have got a lot of birds so I would take a chunk out and whack it with a stick and get all the ants out into a dish to feed them to my birds.

Joshua Allen

Thank you for that.

(Everyone applauded and thanked Josh for his very interesting presentation.)

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