

First record of *Heterotermes indicola* (Isoptera: Rhinotermitidae) from south India

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Billions of dollars are spent annually to control the termites worldwide (Tsunoda, 2003), since they are an highly economically important group. *Heterotermes* spp. (Isoptera: Rhinotermitidae) are mainly structure infesting termites (A.R.Saljoqi *et al.*, 2012), These are widely distributed and most notorious subterranean and also wood destroying (Manzoor *et al.*, 2011). In India, four species of *Heterotermes* are found, of which *Heterotermes indicola* (Wasmann, 1902) is a very common wood destroying termite and is found in places above 20⁰N latitude and extends up to Pakistan and Afghanistan (Maiti, 2006). Other than causing extensive damage to wood works in houses, this serious pest is also reported to destroy paper, clothes and stored products with cellulose content. The wood it attacks is hollowed out by leaving out only the outer shell. In domestic infestations, their galleries are seen running on walls and ceilings, to reach wooden structures (Roonwal and Chhottani, 1989). Because of their highly destructive nature, the species is of great economic importance (Maiti, 1983).

As a part of the ongoing systematic studies on termites of Kerala, we collected a few colonies of *H. indicola*, forming the first report of this species from Kerala as well as the whole of south India. In India, it has been reported only from Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh (Krishna *et al.*, 2013) A few termites sampled from a badly damaged pile of old paper in a godown, at Bellipedi (12°35'12.57"N, 75°18'12.95"E) Kasargode district, have been taxonomically identified as *H. indicola*, as per Maiti (2006). Later a sample collected from a damaged household structure from Chelembra (11°09'25.77"N, 75°52'59.28"E) Malappuaram district, was also identified as the same. The soldiers of *H. indicola* (fig1) can easily be distinguished from other species by their elongate head [length (1.64-1.81mm) and width (0.83mm)], labrum with a needle like hyaline apex and a 0.63mm wide pronotum. A prominent emargination is distinct on the anterior margin and a feeble one on posterior margin of pronotum. Antennae have 15 segments. In worker castes, head capsule is subsquarish and antennae are with 14 segments, of which segment 2 is subequal to 3+4 and the postclypeus being weakly swollen.

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Fig 1. Dorsal view of *H. indicola* soldier.