

## Termite trapping

by

LIEM SWIE LIONG

The inhabitants of the Tengger Mountains, East Java, are very skilful in trapping the winged individuals of termites, which they call „laron”. As is generally known termites choose the West Monsoon for their nuptial flight. As soon as the first rains have fallen the winged termites begin to emerge out of their subterranean habitats. With most species this takes place in the later afternoon or in the early morning hours during or just after rain. In the beginning only a few turn up but shortly they are followed by myriads of individuals until the air seems filled with them.

It is interesting to note how many creatures are just waiting for this moment and how busy they get when the nuptial flight of the termites begins. For every one of these waiting animals it means a festival. Mammals, birds, amphibians, insects and other lower animals, all consider the larons a dainty bit and it is amusing to watch the hunters in their more or less skilful endeavours to catch their prey. But there has already been said enough by other authors in Indonesia about laron catching by animals, so I may as well pass this and only refer to the "Tropische Natuur" 1927, p. 134, 160; 1928, p. 4, 65, 82. My intention is to describe the method of catching larons used by the inhabitants of the Tengger Mountains.

Owing to his intelligence, man is not satisfied with catching larons one by one, as the animal hunters do. The Javanese does it on a big scale without much loss of energy, in fact he does it so cleverly that not a single specimen of the winged insects, when emerging from the nest, escapes from the trap set by man. So far as I know larons are eaten by the natives of all tropical countries. These insects are very fat and generally considered to be tasteful.

Weeks before the swarming time begins people are already busy locating the spots where these insects will emerge. In connection with the preparatory work done by the termite workers, who are building an exit for the swarming larons protruding above the surface of the earth, these places are easily recognized. Spots where the nests of the previous year are located are cleared every new season. Every year new swarms emerge there. New nests are usually discovered only incidentally, when people are tilling the land or collecting fire wood. Wherever a termitarium is situated in the ground the winged individuals will appear in time. Besides, in the higher mountains these colonies are to be found almost everywhere. Against the end of the dry season people are going around in search of the places where the larons are to emerge. When such a spot has been discovered the surroundings of it are cleaned and the "discoverer" regards the larons of that place as his property. One person often claims a number of places which he inspects every day. By the activity of the worker termites at the exit he is able predict the day of emergence. When that day has come he will proceed to set the trap in the hours of the afternoon. In all its simpleness this trap is yet a very effective means of trapping the insects. The only implements the hunter carries with him are a patjol (a kind of spade), and a knife.

A round hole of 10 inches deep with a diameter of 8 inches is dug into the ground, about 10 inches from the exit (fig. 1, A). Then a narrow ditch is dug to connect the exit with the hole E. This ditch is covered by a semicircular piece of bast from a banana stem (in fact, a piece of the leaf sheath), the open side directed to the bottom of the ditch, thus forming a kind of a tunnel (B). The end of the tunnel, overlapping the exit, is closed with banana-leaf to prevent the larons taking the wrong way.

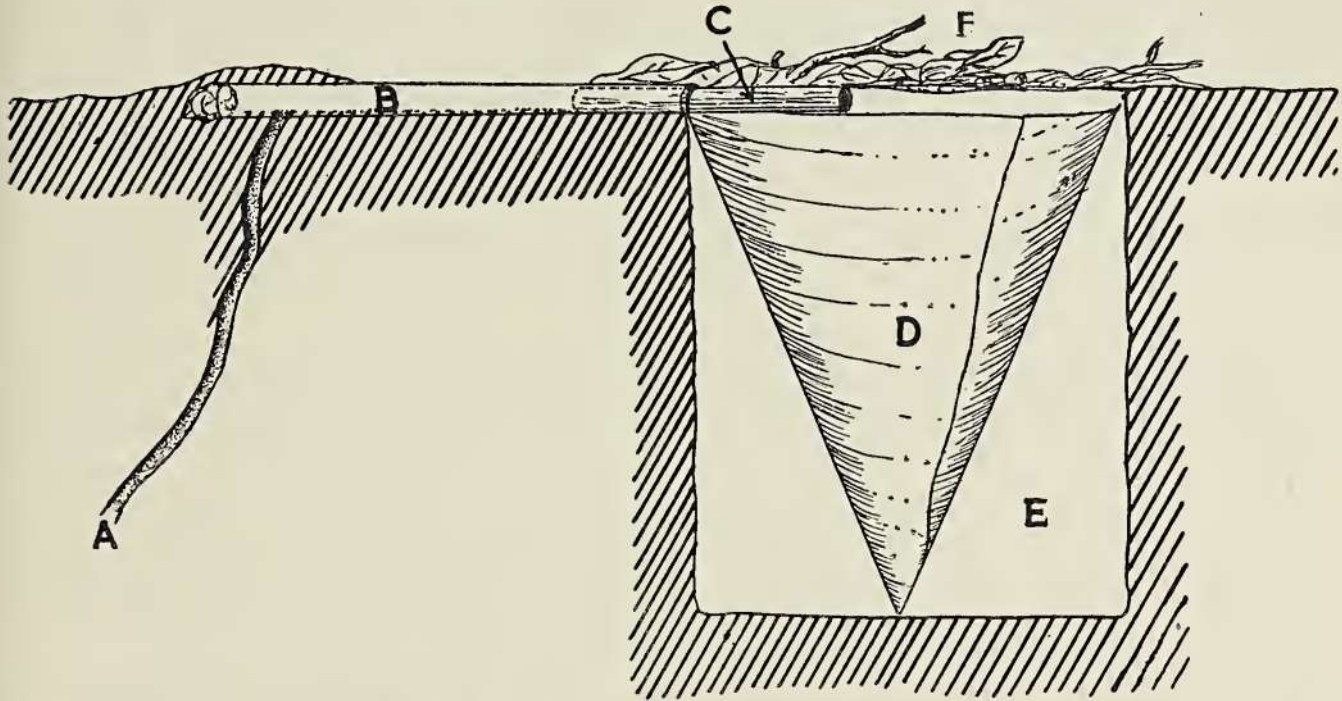


Diagram of a termite trap. A : exit tunnel of the termite nest. B : semicylinder, made of banana stem. C : tube, made of banana leaf. D : funnel, made of the same. E : hole in the ground. F : cover of branches and leaves.

The collector does not cover the bottom of the tunnel with banana bast as this would be too slippery and making the walking for the larons too difficult, in which case they would turn back in order to look for another exit. The tunnel which reaches only to the edge of the hole is prolonged by a pipe, made of banana-leaf (C), which sticks out 4 inches over the edge of hole E. A funnel-shaped piece of banana leaf (D), the pointed end without an opening, is placed in the hole E, so that the pipe C can empty its contents into the funnel. It is of importance that the smooth upper side of the leaf should form the inside of the funnel. The funnel D is then covered with small twigs and leaves (F). When swarming time has arrived the larons will pass tunnel B and pipe C and fall into the funnel from where they cannot escape by crawling out owing to the smooth inside of the funnel. Flying out is impossible too as the funnel has been covered with leaves. The banana leaf pipe is smooth inside but very short. When the larons at the head of the swarm after the march through the tunnel arrive at the smooth pipe C, which affords no good walking for them, they are inclined to turn back, but the pressure of the great mass of larons behind them is so strong that they are forced to go on until they fall into the funnel.

After setting the trap the Javanese goes home and waits there until the sun has set and darkness has fallen, then he goes back to inspect his traps which, if made correctly, generally will already be filled with larons. Often some of the traps are placed far from the collector's house

so that he sometimes resolves to wait with the inspection till next morning. In that case he will more often than not be disillusioned as the cunning luwak, being a gourmand, will have transferred the catch into its stomach.

One trap will yield about 60 cc. of larons. The Javanese remove the wings from the thorax of the insects by shaking them in a flat, round bamboo basket, called "tampak". As is known the winged termites easily throw off their wings themselves. During the laron season these insects are for sale at the pasars (market places). They are sold the day after collecting, without wings, placed in earthen cups; most of them are dead at that time.

The larons are roasted in their own fat, and served with rice. Or they are wrapped into banana leaf with grated cocoanut and spices, and steamed.

Bogor, Indonesia, Museum Zoologicum Bogoriense, December 1951.

---

**Komt de wants *Copium cornutum* Thunb. in Nederland voor?** In deze Berichten, 1 Aug. 1952, 326, deel 14, pp. 123—124, heeft A. COLLART gewezen op twee insecten, naar welke in Nederland gezocht moest worden. Een daarvan, *Copium cornutum*, is een wants die gallen maakt in de bloemen van *Teucrium Chamaedrys* L. COLLART deelt mede, dat hij het dier verzameld heeft op de St. Pietersberg, doch op het Belgische gedeelte daarvan. Hij acht het dus waarschijnlijk, dat deze *Copium*-soort ook in Nederlands Limburg zal worden gevonden.

Ik had reeds lang mijn aandacht op deze gal gevestigd en in de eerste dagen van September 1952 vertoefde ik in Bemelen om naar de *Teucrium* en de daarop voorkomende bloemgal te zoeken. Bemelen is bovendien de enige plaats in Nederland, waar een andere *Teucrium*-soort, nl. *T. montanum* L., voorkomt. Ook op deze plant komt een bloemgal voor, veroorzaakt door een andere *Copium*-soort, nl. *C. teucree* Host.

Ik was vergezeld door de heer C. G. F. SCHÜTZ, die de omgeving van Bemelen goed kent en die *Teucrium Chamaedrys* nog tijdens de oorlog in de buurt van Gronsveld gevonden had. Hij bracht mij naar de vindplaats, maar alles was door struiken en grassen overwoekerd en *Teucrium Chamaedrys* vonden wij niet meer.

De heer D. C. VAN SCHAIK bracht ons naar de groeiplaats van *Teucrium montanum*. Een 8-tal exemplaren daarvan groeiden op een richel boven een steile kalkwand. Het was mij niet mogelijk de plaats te bereiken, doch de heer VAN SCHAIK klom er heen en plukte enkele takjes voor mij. De plant was echter uitgebloeid en er kwamen geen gallen op voor. De heer VAN SCHAIK belde een plantenkenner in Maastricht op, doch deze deelde mede, dat op dit ogenblik geen planten van *Teucrium Chamaedrys* meer in het wild voorkomen.

De heer P. VAN NIEUWENHOVEN te Maastricht deelde mij mede, dat de plant in tuinen gekweekt wordt, doch dat hij daarop geen gallen had kunnen ontdekken. Ook een oproep door hem gedaan in de vergadering van het Natuurhistorisch Genootschap had geen resultaat opgeleverd.

Ofschoon nooit met zekerheid gezegd kan worden, dat *Teucrium Chamaedrys* nergens meer in Zuid-Limburg groeit, lijkt het voorlopig toch maar beter aan te nemen, dat *Copium cornutum* niet of niet meer in Nederland voorkomt.

W. M. DOCTERS VAN LEEUWEN, Leersum, September 1952.