First record of the pest termite *Coptotermes beckeri* Mathur and Chhottani (Isoptera: Rhinotermitidae) from Kerala

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ABSTRACT: *Coptotermes beckeri* Mathur and Chhottani, a subterranean termite species under Rhinotermitidae family is reported for the first time from Kerala. Subterranean termites are polyphagous and consume all available cellulose materials- paper, dead wood in structural frames, live wood in plantations and forests alike, hence gain a significant pest status. © 2016 Association for Advancement of Entomology

KEYWORDS: Subterranean, Polyphagous, *Coptotermes beckeri*, Kerala

The invasion of termites has always been a big problem for humans, since the damage caused by them lead to huge economic loss. They are one of the most destructive insect pests (Cheng and Cheung, 2014) all over the world. Among termites, *Coptotermes* spp. (Isoptera: Rhinotermitidae) are widely distributed and highly destructive in nature (Maiti, 2006). Most of the species of this genus are subterranean and are among the major house and structure infesting termites (Scheffrahn and Su, 2000). From India, seven species of *Coptotermes* are reported, *Coptotermes ceylonicus* Holmgren, *Coptotermes gaurii* Roonwal and Krishna, *Coptotermes gestroi* (Wasmann), *Coptotermes heimi* (Wasmann), *Coptotermes kishori* Roonwal and Chhotani, *Coptotermes premrasmii* Ahmad and *Coptotermes beckeri* Mathur and Chhotani, of these, the last three are endemic to India (Krishna et al., 2013). Of the above *C. heimi* is a global invasive and widespread species.

A termite attack was noticed on wooden doors (Fig.5) and some concrete areas in an apartment (located on the third floor), in Chalapuram (lat-11.24°N long- 75.79°E), Kozhikode Dist, Kerala, on 27.xi.2014. A few samples were collected and taxonomically analysed. Based on Roonwal and Chhotani, 1989 and also Maiti, 2006, the termite was identified to be *Coptotermes beckeri* (Fig.1-2) a subterranean species, formerly reported only from Tamil Nadu (Krishna et al., 2013). This report forms the first record of the species from Kerala. Three species of *Coptotermes* known hitherto from Kerala are *C. heimi*, *C. ceylonicus* and *C. kishori* (Amina and Rajmohana, 2014; Mathew, 2015). Sixty species were listed in the recent checklist on termites of Kerala by Amina and Rajmohana, 2014, and the present study updates the total number to 61. The checklist of termites of Kerala, by Mathew, 2015, listed only 58 species, missed to include *Heterotermes indicola* (Wasmann) (Amina and Rajmohana, 2013a) and *Ceylonitermellus periyarensis* Amina and Rajmohana (Amina and Rajmohana, 2013b).

*C. beckeri* is one of the smallest species among *Coptotermes* (Table-1). Their soldiers can easily be distinguished from other species by their small

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