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By: Stefan Anitei, Science Editor



Madagascar Giant Hissing Cockroach (Gromphadorhina portentosa)

Termites Are Nothing More Than "Social Cockroaches"

DNA proves it

They are called "white ants" but it was already known they have nothing to do with the real ants (which are in fact a type of wasps). But believe it or not, scientists suspected for a long time that these insects, displaying an extremely complicated social structure and behavior inside their enormous colonies and able to build magnificent clay nests, are in fact related to the detested cockroaches and praying mantis. Now British researchers have come with the most irrefutable approach to prove it: DNA analysis. Their new research points out that termites do not belong to a separate order (Isoptera), but they should be classified as a family of cockroaches. The DNA sequences of five termite genes detected as the termites' closest relatives a species of wood-eating cockroaches. The tests employed genes from 107 species of Dictyoptera Superorder (termites, cockroaches and mantids) to achieve an evolutionary image. "In the past, people thought that because termites were so different in appearance, they belonged to a different order. It has only been recently when we have been able to look at other things than the obvious body shapes and sizes that we began to realize that they are very similar to cockroaches. Examining the insects' DNA offered much more robust data about the relationship between the insects", said Dr. Eggleton from the Natural History Museum (NHM), London. The results showed that termites must be classified as a family (Termitidae) of cockroaches inside the order Blattodea. "The classification of termites was an ongoing debate that stretched back to the 1930s. Disagreements began when researchers found some of the microbes in the guts of termites that allow them to digest wood were also found in a group of cockroaches. The argument has gone backwards and forwards because of differing datasets over the years. I think what we have done is produce the strongest set of data to date that termites are actually social cockroaches", explained Eggleton.