

# DR DON'S Bizarre TERMITE PAGE

Termites are much more than house-eating pests. They're interesting animals and their interactions with humans can be quite unexpected. How about termites infesting an aircraft and reducing the pilot's ability to control it? [Well, it really did happen once!](#) Rats! That link's dead now

Yes, termites can damage transportation, but more often they are found in boats and cargo. On the other hand, the people of Andros Island in the Bahamas use the mud from termite mounds to [caulk their boats!](#)

In some places, according to an article in [Northern Miner](#) (vol 81 no. 38 which is no longer freely available on the web), termites' deep digging concentrates ore on the surface where it is more easily sampled. Surveys in the African nation of Niger used the earth of termite mounds to find [gold](#). Over time, the actions of termites can have profound changes. It is [claimed](#) that, over thousands of years, termites have contributed the

Termites' interaction with mineral industry goes back a long way, soil from termite mounds was used in early ironmaking furnaces in Africa, according to [an article in American Scientist](#).

In Australia, we have people who transport termite mounds, to place in museums (there was a huge one in the [foyer of the West Australian Museum](#) in Perth), to decorate outback-style boutiques in airport lounges and as ornaments in gardens! The [Dählhölzli Museum](#) in Bern, Switzerland has its own (live) African termite mound with over a million termites. Perhaps the weirdest artificial mound is the work of sculptor Yvonne Dorward in Mataranka a [six-foot high talking termite mound in the main street](#).

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significant quantities of nitrates in a huge body of water, the Great Artesian Basin, an aquifer that underlies much of inland Australia. Termites and science certainly do make strange partners.

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In Australia, in the early days of telephony, it took [hundreds of boundary riders to fight termite attack on the posts](#), and even now engineers planning subterranean electrical cables are [urged to remember](#) how much damage they can do and special [no-chew cables](#) have been developed. Termites as a flood risk? In China, a [special radar](#) was developed to detect termite nests in dykes and dams.

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Termites are a part of our culture, they appear in [cartoons](#) and [jokes](#). There's a band called [The Termites](#) ([sound clips](#)). Another band, the Templebears have a song called "[Once more into the termite mound](#)". And there's something out there called the [termite queen](#). Not to forget Beck's strange [piece](#) "Time is a piece of wax / melting on a termite / he's choking on the splinters". Stretching back at least 40,000 years, [termites](#) have been helping create the [didgeridu](#), a hollow wooden tree trunk that is a [wonderful musical instrument](#). People [think](#) about termites in a

Dr Gary Hurd of [Saddleback Community College](#) has put up a web page with photos of [termite poo](#). Fresh and 1,100 years old! (Stranger even, is that pest controllers can sometimes tell the species of a termite by the shape of its poo).

I bet you didn't know/remember that the original movie script of Monty Python's Holy Grail, in the bit about swallows and coconuts [mentioned termites](#).

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Around the world, lots of people eat termites (it isn't as crazy as it sounds, winged termites are very nutritious, and especially when lightly fried, reasonably tasty). Termites are important in the diets of many [ants](#), [lizards](#) and birds and there are quite a few specialist feeders such as [aardvarks](#), [aardwolves](#) and [numbats](#), but did you know that they are also eaten by [lions](#) and [gorillas](#)? Usenet news seems to always have a mention somewhere of our close relative the chimpanzee's habit of using a twig tool to [fish termites from their galleries](#). Fish, especially salmonids, are big predators of flying termites. Termitophile anglers [can get their own backwith this neat design](#) from the [Goulburn Valley Fly Fishing Centre](#).

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Thinking of what termites eat, consider their role in banking. Gracie Scruggs of the US Treasury says that termites [eat](#)

philosophical sense and use them for [political analogy](#). Some imagine human forms in termite nests as in [this picture](#) entitled "*Mother and Child*" near Darwin. There's even a suggestion as to what to give a termite for a [Christmas present!](#) The most dangerous and feared animal in the Australian bush is the termite according to the writers of an [arty radio show](#). Back to aircraft again, there's a new avionics system that's called [Termite](#). They appear in fiction as well. Check out the best seller "[Brother Termite](#)". People with supercomputers to play with have even been known to delve into the [world of the termites' mound](#). Apparently, as Grant's Scripture References tell us, even [The Book of Mormon](#) includes termites (but you'll have to search to find it). There's even a site that links termites to [Qur'an](#), claiming that they are examples of Allah's "flawless design".

[more paper money](#) than do dogs, horses and pigs.

Just thinking about productivity, I doubt if anything can match the output of a mature African *Macrotermes* [queen](#) who it is said, can lay 50,000 eggs a day and lives for around 30 years. That's more than 25 million offspring! I find it hard to believe. Some researchers put the maximum rate at around 20,000 per day. Even then, that's 24 hours,  $24 \times 60 = 1440$  minutes  $\times 60 = 86,400$  seconds or one egg every 4.32 seconds. Sure beats chickens!.

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