

Termite Communities in Sugarcane Plantations in Southeastern Brazil: an Ecological Approach

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EntomoBrasilis 8 (2): 105-116 (2015)

Abstract. Termites are key components of soil fauna, playing an essential role in organic matter decomposition and nutrient cycling. However, they can cause significant economic losses in commercial plantations, such as sugar cane. Therefore, the correct identification of termite species is critical for pest control. Here, we evaluated the species richness, abundance and functional groups of termites in sugarcane plantations in 53 cities throughout the state of São Paulo, southeastern Brazil. We also analyzed the influence of macroclimatic variables on termite species distribution and functional groups. We found 22 taxa of two families, of which the most frequent species were Termitidae (96.51%). Within this family, Apicotermitinae had the highest frequency of occurrence (37.12%), followed by Termitinae (30.57%), Syntermitinae (27.95%), and Nasutitermitinae (0.8%). The other family, Rhinotermitidae, had the lowest frequency (3.5%), being represented only by *Heterotermes sulcatus* Mathews. We classified *Neocapritermes opacus* Hagen (29.26%), Apicotermitinae sp.2 (24.89%), *Cornitermes cumulans* Kollar (13.10%), and Apicotermitinae sp.1 (6.99%) as common taxa. The remaining 18 species were classified as rare. The most common functional group was humus-feeders (37%), followed by wood-feeders (34%), grass-litter feeders (25%), and intermediate feeders (4%). Climate influenced the distribution of common species, humus-feeders and grass-litter feeders. Regarding the pest status of termites in sugar cane plantations, we suggest that the exasperated use of pesticide in the last decades has reduced the abundance of species considered pests (e.g. *Heterotermes*) and reinforce the importance of ecological approaches for determining the best pest control methods.

Keywords: Functional groups; *Heterotermes* sp.; Isoptera.

Comunidades de Cupins em Cultivos de Cana-de-Açúcar no Estado de São Paulo: Uma Abordagem Ecológica

Resumo. Os cupins são importantes componentes da fauna de solo, atuando na decomposição da matéria orgânica e ciclagem de nutrientes. Porém, em cultivos de cana-de-açúcar, podem provocar perdas econômicas significativas. A correta identificação das espécies de cupins é um ponto crítico para o controle daquelas que adquiriram e/ou que podem atingir o status de praga. Este trabalho objetivou identificar a riqueza, a abundância e os grupos funcionais destes insetos em canaviais de 53 municípios do estado de São Paulo. Paralelamente, avaliou-se as variáveis macroclimáticas influenciam a distribuição das comunidades de cupins e dos grupos funcionais. A riqueza obtida foi de 22 táxons. Da família Termitidae (96,51%), a maior frequência de ocorrência foi da subfamília Apicotermitinae (37,12%), seguindo-se Termitinae (30,57%), Syntermitinae (27,95%) e Nasutitermitinae (0,8%). A família Rhinotermitidae (3,5%) esteve representada apenas por *Heterotermes sulcatus* Mathews. Quatro táxons foram considerados comuns em canaviais, *Neocapritermes opacus* Hagen (29,26%), Apicotermitinae sp.2 (24,89%), *Cornitermes cumulans* Kollar (13,10%) e Apicotermitinae sp.1 (6,99%) e os 18 restantes foram classificados como raros. O grupo funcional mais frequente foi o dos humívoros (37%), seguido por xilófagos (34%), comedores de serrapilheira (25%) e intermediários (4%). O clima influenciou a distribuição das espécies comuns, bem como dos grupos funcionais dos humívoros e dos comedores de serrapilheira. Sugere-se que o uso intensivo de pesticidas nas últimas décadas reduziu a abundância de espécies até então consideradas praga em cana-de-açúcar (ex. *Heterotermes*), o que reforça a importância dos estudos ecológicos para a definição de métodos de controle mais adequados.

Palavras-chave: Grupos funcionais; *Heterotermes* sp.; Isoptera.

Termite communities are usually species rich systems, with different feeding and nesting strategies. Termites are the main group involved in the intake and processing of organic and mineral matter (LAVELLE *et al.* 1997; JONES 2000; GATHORNE-HARDY *et al.* 2001), also playing a key role in the carbon decomposition and mineralization, changing the soil structure (BIGNELL & EGGLETON 2000; ACKERMAN *et al.* 2007). Some species seem to be more sensitive to land use than others. For example, geophagous are vulnerable to agricultural activities, which reduces species richness and abundance of this group. The decline in geophagous species is often harmful to vegetation (BANDEIRA & VASCONCELLOS 2002; BANDEIRA *et al.* 2003). Geophagous are associated with the increase in nitrogen and phosphorus release, drainage and aeration of the soil and humidification and stabilization of organic matter (LAVELLE *et al.* 1997; DIBOG *et al.* 1999; JUNQUEIRA *et al.* 2008). However, given the importance of termites in maintaining the fertility, aeration, and porosity of tropical soils, studies on their reproductive biology and

population dynamics should be encouraged, to improve control agents, and species-specific management techniques (MIRANDA *et al.* 2004).

On the other hand, xylophagous termites do not seem to be influenced by agricultural practices (DE SOUZA & BROWN 1994; EGGLETON *et al.* 1997, 2002; BANDEIRA & VASCONCELLOS 2002; BANDEIRA *et al.* 2003). Xylophagous are key components of the soil fauna in native forests, playing an essential role in the decomposition of organic matter, nutrient cycling, aeration, drainage, and the establishment of new soil in eroded areas (COLLINS 1981; BERTI-FILHO 1995; JUNQUEIRA *et al.* 2008). However, some species may become pests in planted forests. For example, they are known to cause significant economic damages in *Eucalyptus* plantations (WARDELL 1987; LAFFONT *et al.* 1998). More recently this group has also been mentioned as pests in sugarcane plantations (BATISTA-

Financial support: Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Campinas

PEREIRA *et al.* 2004).

There is a growing interest in the effect of termites on sugarcane crops and planted forest. Due to the concern that some species might become pests, there is a growing body of literature dealing with reproductive biology and population dynamics of several insect species (MIRANDA *et al.* 2004; JUNQUEIRA *et al.* 2008; MENZEL & DIEHL 2008, 2010; ACKERMAN *et al.* 2009).

The two top countries producing sugarcane in 2007 were Brazil, with 33% of world production, and India, concentrating 23% of the production (INFORMA ECONOMICS/FNP SOUTH AMERICA 2009). The use of sugarcane to produce biofuels increased globally in the past 30 years. The interest in this crop is promoting the adoption of more efficient farming practices that contributed to the increase in productivity (CHEAVEGATTI-GIANOTTO *et al.* 2011).

Sugarcane has been an economically important crop in Brazil since early sixteenth century. Around 7.5 million ha were cultivated with sugarcane between 2009 and 2010, producing about 612 million tons. Half of this was used in the sugar industry, while the remainder produced about 25 billion liters of ethanol and other products, such as animal food and *cachaça* (CONAB 2009; CHEAVEGATTI-GIANOTTO *et al.* 2011).

Sugarcane plantation occupies a large area in Brazil, including low fertility and sandy soils. Those factors favor the occurrence of subterranean termites, which can damage different growth stages of the cane (CAMPOS *et al.* 1988). For example, termites are major pest in sugarcane plantations in northeastern Brazil, with a high incidence of the genera *Heterotermes* and *Neocapritermes*. A previous study found four termite species in a sugarcane plantation in northeastern Brazil but only one was causing damage (*Cylindrotermes nordenskiöldi* Holmgren), while another (*Amitermes nordestinus* Mélo & Fontes) could be a potential pest (MIRANDA *et al.* 2004) and the abundance and spatial distribution of these species were mainly influenced by the root biomass and the amount of organic matter in the soil. Additionally, other studies (e.g., NOVARETTI & FONTES 1998) reported 14 termite species in sugarcane plantations in the southeastern part of the county, while ALMEIDA & ALVES (1999) considered *Heterotermes tenuis* Hagen as the main pest species in São Paulo, due to its wide distribution and high abundance.

Here, we identify the richness, abundance and functional groups of species of termites and used species abundance distribution to define common and rare species of termites in sugarcane plantations of 53 cities in the state of São Paulo, southeastern Brazil. We also investigated in the scientific literature if the most common species are potential pests. Finally, we tested if macroclimatic variables (e.g., temperature and precipitation)

and geographical distance influence the distribution of termite species and functional groups.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Sampling and identification. We sampled termites in sugarcane plantations in 53 cities (Figure 1, Appendix 1) of the São Paulo state, Brazil. Plantations were selected by the “Centro de Tecnologia Canavieira” (Center for Sugarcane Technology, Piracicaba, São Paulo state) (collection license SISBIO #12205-1). Sampling occurred in 2011 after the end of the sugarcane cycle, when it is harvested, along with its roots. Then, the soil is prepared with liming for a new planting (DANTAS 2011). We sampled termite by opening two burrows (2,500 cm² with 30 cm depth) per hectare in sugarcane tussocks (following ARRIGONI *et al.* 1998). Each sampling was performed one month after the harvest. Collected termites were stored in entomological glazing with 80% ethanol.

We used catalogs and keys to identify termite species, including ARAÚJO (1977), CANCELLO (1986, 1989), CONSTANTINO (1994, 1995, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2014), CONSTANTINO *et al.* (2006), CONSTANTINO & CARVALHO (2011), EMERSON (1952), FONTES (1985, 1992, 1995), KRISHNA & ARAÚJO (1968), MATHEWS (1977), MILL (1983), ROCHA & CANCELLO (2009), and ROCHA *et al.* (2011, 2012a, 2012b). Species identification was confirmed by specialists (see acknowledgements). The collected specimens are housed in the Collection of Isoptera, Department of Biological Sciences, Center for Life Sciences, Pontifical Catholic University of Campinas.

Functional group definition. Functional groups were defined based on species feeding guilds (MATHEWS 1977; GONTIJO & DOMINGOS 1991; DE SOUZA & BROWN 1994; EGGLETON *et al.* 1995, 1997; JONES & BRENDLE 1998; JONES 2000). A previous study (BIGNELL & EGGLETON 2000) defined functional groups as follows: geophages, xylophagous, intermediaries between geophages and xylophagous, leaf-litter dwellers, grass-eaters, and other feeding groups (species that feed on fungi, algae, lichens, manure and vertebrate corpses).

REZENDE (2012) classified the feeding habits of South American Termitidae species based on jaw morphology of workers and intestinal contents. Thus, we followed this classification to define functional groups as wood-feeders, humus-feeders, grass-litter feeders, and intermediate feeders.

Defining common and rare species. We followed SIQUEIRA *et al.* (2012) to define common and rare species based on the inflection point in a rank abundance curve, i.e., the point in which the curvature change. Species on the left side were

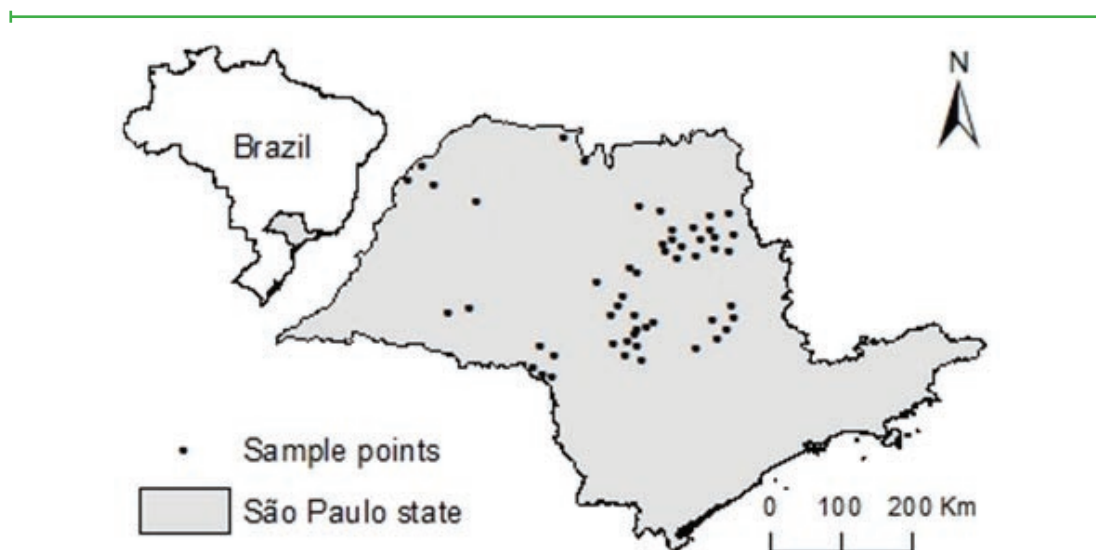


Figure 1. Distribution of cities in the state of São Paulo in which termites were sampled in sugarcane plantations.

defined as common and those on the right side as rare. This is a straightforward visual method that uses untransformed abundances, stressing the real differences between common and rare species.

Climatic data. We obtained the altitude and macroclimatic variables (Appendix 2) from WorldClim (HILJMANS *et al.* 2005). As they are highly correlated, we performed a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to reduce the dimensionality. We used the broken stick model to select meaningful principal components (PC, LEGENDRE & LEGENDRE 2012), which resulted in the retention of two PCs that together explained 85% of the variation of the data. Then, we calculated the Euclidean distance between PC 1 and PC 2 that will be entered in a Mantel test (see below).

Data Analysis

Spatial variables. We translated the matrix of site coordinates (latitude and longitude) into spatial predictors using distance-based Moran Eigenvector Maps (dbMEM), formally called Principal Coordinates of Neighbor Matrices (PCNM, DRAY *et al.* 2006, 2012). From a Euclidean pair-wise distance matrix between sampled sites, we computed the threshold value and constructed a truncated distance matrix. This matrix kept distances lower than the threshold unchanged and multiplied those higher by four times the threshold. We then performed a Principal Coordinate Analysis (PCoA) on the truncated distance matrix to obtain eigenvectors that were transformed to a distance matrix to be used as spatial predictors in Mantel tests.

Rank-Dominance curves and species abundance distribution (SADs). We calculated a species accumulation curve (SAC) using the random method, which finds the mean SAC and its standard deviation from random permutations of the data (GOTELLI & COLWELL 2001). We built a Species Abundance Distribution (SAD) curve using Whittaker plots, by ranking species (from most to least abundant) in the *x*-axis and their raw abundances in the *y*-axis. Several theoretical models have been suggested to fit observed SADs (reviewed in TOKESHI 1999; MAGURRAN 2004; MCGILL *et al.* 2007). Here, we used the following models: broken stick, Motomura's geometric series, lognormal, Zipf, and Zipf-Mandelbrot. We used generalized linear (lognormal and Zipf) and nonlinear models (Zipf-Mandelbrot and geometric series) along with the Akaike Information Criteria (AIC) to select the theoretical model that best fitted the observed SAD (WILSON 1991).

Partial Mantel test. To test if macroclimatic variables explain the variation in termite species composition, we used a partial Mantel test, which tests the effect of macroclimatic variables (predictor) on species composition while controlling for the effect of spatial variables. A partial Mantel test was used to control for the effect of spatial autocorrelation on species distribution, i.e., the phenomenon by which sites closer to each other have more similar species composition than further ones, regardless of environmental variation (DRAY *et al.* 2006, 2012; LEGENDRE & LEGENDRE 2012). Here, we transformed the species composition into a dissimilarity matrix using the Bray-Curtis distance against macroclimatic dissimilarity obtained above, while controlling for the effect of spatial distance (Euclidean distance) (LEGENDRE & LEGENDRE 2012). The significance of the correlation was estimated by 999 permutations of rows and columns of the species dissimilarity matrix (LEGENDRE & LEGENDRE 2012). We also made separate Partial Mantel tests using each functional group: wood-feeder, humus-feeder, and grass-litter feeder. We could not run partial Mantel tests for the intermediate group because we found only two species. Analyses were conducted in R (R CORE TEAM, 2013) packages vegan (OKSANEN *et al.* 2013) and labdsv (ROBERTS 2013).

RESULTS

Richness and abundance. We obtained 247 samples, of

which 229 (92%) could be identified. Total species richness was 22 taxa (Table 1). The majority of the taxa (96.51%) belonged to Termitidae, with higher occurrence frequency of Apicotermittinae (37.12%) with four morphospecies, followed by Termitinae (30.57%) with the genera *Neocapritermes* and *Cylindrotermes*, and Syntermitinae (27.95%) with the genera *Cornitermes*, *Syntermes*, *Embiratermes*, *Proconitermes*, and *Silvestritermes*. The lowest occurrences (0.87%) were recorded for the Nasutitermitinae genera *Parvitermes* and *Velocitermes*. There was only one species of Rhinotermitidae (3.49%), *Heterotermes sulcatus* Mathews.

Our sampling method was efficient to collect species, since the species accumulation curve tended to an asymptote (Figure 2). The species abundance distribution is best fitted by the Zipf-Mandelbrot model (Figure 3).

Common and rare species. We considered four taxa as common: *Neocapritermes opacus* Hagen (29.26%), *Apicotermittinae* sp.2 (24.89%), *Cornitermes cumulans* Kollar (13.10%), and *Apicotermittinae* sp.1 (6.99%). The remaining 18 taxa were considered rare (Figure 4).

Functional groups. The most frequent functional group was humus-feeder (37%), followed by wood-feeder (34%), grass-litter feeder (25%), and intermediate feeders (4%) (Table 1). We mapped the occurrence frequency of the two most frequent groups by city, showing those that had a frequency of occurrence $\geq 50\%$ in each city (Figure 5, Appendix 3). Of the 53 cities sampled, 16 had predominant occurrence of humus-feeder species and 18 wood-feeder species.

Climatic variables. We found a positive correlation between climate and species composition, independent on the geographic distance ($r = 0.13$, $P < 0.01$, Figure 6). Additionally, climate influenced the distribution of common ($r = 0.11$, $P < 0.01$), but not rare species ($r = 0.074$, $P = 0.089$).

We found a low and marginally significant correlation between climate and functional group composition ($r = 0.10$, $P = 0.079$). However, the composition of humus-feeders ($r = 0.277$, $P = 0.002$) and grass-litter feeders ($r = 0.158$, $P = 0.03$) are correlated with the climate when tested separately, contrarily to wood-feeders ($r = 0.02$, $P = 0.395$).

DISCUSSION

Termite occurrence in sugarcane plantations. We found that the Apicotermittinae (37%) was the most frequent subfamily of Termitidae, followed by Termitinae (30.57%), and Syntermitinae (27.95%). The only species from another family (Rhinotermitidae) was *H. sulcatus* (3.49%).

- Subfamily Apicotermittinae: Taxa of this little known subfamily had the highest frequency of occurrence, including Apicotermittinae sp. 1 and 2, which was among the four most common taxa. Most species of this subfamily are humus-feeders that do not build epigeal or arboreal nests (CONSTANTINO 1999). Members of this subfamily can be usually found cohabiting nests of other termites species, promoting organic matter decomposition and nutrient cycling (DIEHL *et al.* 2005; CUNHA & MORAIS 2010). There are only five genera of this subfamily in South America (CONSTANTINO 2002a), of which only *Anoplotermes pacificus* Müller is considered a pest of *Eucalyptus*. Also, species of *Aparatermes* and *Grigiotermes* are considered pests of rice crops (reviewed in CONSTANTINO 2002b). However, most species of this group helps in nutrient cycling and soil aeration, acting as primary consumers and decomposers (LAVELLE *et al.* 1997; BIGNELL & EGLETON 2000; HOLT & LEPAGE 2000; DAVIES 2002). Thus, the occurrence of Apicotermittinae in sugarcane plantations seems to be important for the maintenance of soil quality, and the use of insecticides is unnecessary.

Table 1: Termite species recorded, with functional group, and nesting in sugarcane plantations of 53 cities in the state of São Paulo, Brazil.

Family	Subfamily	Species	Sampling units	Frequency	Functional group*	Pest Status **	Crops **
Rhinotermitidae			8	3.49			
		<i>Heterotermes sulcatus</i> Mathews	8	3.49	wood	low	unknown
Termitidae			221	96.51			
	Apicotermitinae		85	37.12			
		Apicotermitinae sp.	8	3.49	humus	unknown	various
		Apicotermitinae sp.1	16	6.99	humus	unknown	various
		Apicotermitinae sp.2	57	24.89	humus	unknown	various
		Apicotermitinae sp.3	4	1.75	humus	unknown	various
	Nasutitermitinae		2	0.87			
		<i>Parvitermes</i> sp. Emerson (in Snyder)	1	0.435	wood	unknown	unknown
		<i>Velocitermes</i> sp. Holmgren	1	0.435	grass-litter	unknown	soybean, cassava
	Syntermitinae		64	27.95			
		<i>Enbivatermes heterotipus</i> Silvestri	7	3.06	intermediate	unknown	eucalyptus
		<i>Cornitermes bequaerti</i> Emerson	7	3.06	grass-litter	very low	pasture
		<i>Cornitermes cumulans</i> Kollar (in Pohl)	30	13.10	grass-litter	major	pasture, sugarcane
		<i>Cornitermes</i> sp. Wasmann	1	0.44	grass-litter	major	pasture, sugarcane
		<i>Procornitermes triacifer</i> Silvestri	4	1.75	grass-litter	major	sugarcane, rice, coffee, eucalyptus, maize
		<i>Silvestritermes euamignathus</i> Silvestri	1	0.44	intermediate	unknown	unknown
		<i>Syntermes dirus</i> Burmeister	1	0.44	grass-litter	unknown	unknown
		<i>Syntermes molestus</i> Burmeister	1	0.44	grass-litter	very low	sugarcane, rice
		<i>Syntermes nanus</i> Constantino	4	1.75	grass-litter	major	eucalyptus, rice
		<i>Syntermes insidians</i> Silvestri	2	0.87	grass-litter	very low	eucalyptus
		<i>Syntermes</i> sp. Holmgren	5	2.18	grass-litter	unknown	unknown
		<i>Syntermes</i> sp.1	1	0.44	grass-litter	unknown	unknown
	Termitinae		70	30.57			
		<i>Cylindrotermes caata</i> Rocha & Cancellato	1	0.44	wood	very low	sugarcane, eucalyptus
		<i>Cylindrotermes</i> sp. Holmgren	2	0.87	wood	unknown	unknown
		<i>Neocapritermes opacus</i> Hagen	67	29.26	wood	major	eucalyptus
TOTAL	4	22	229	100			

* Following REZENDE (2012) ** Following CONSTANTINO (2002b)

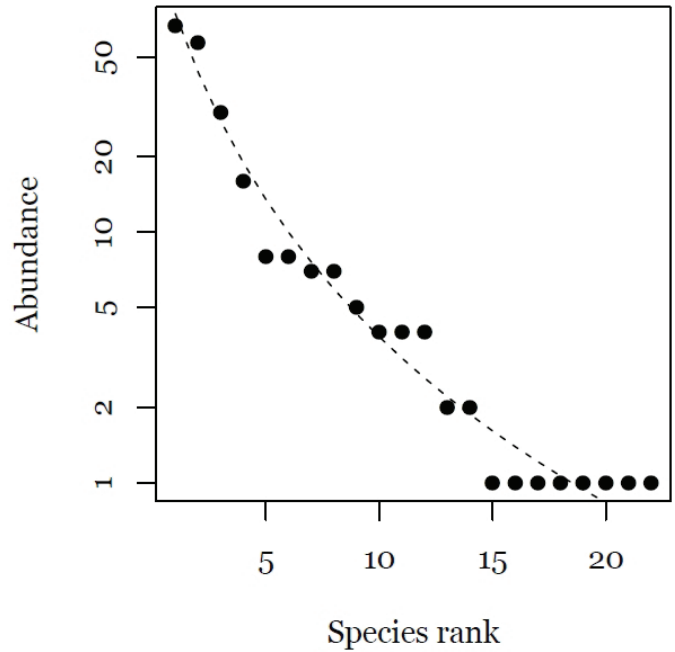
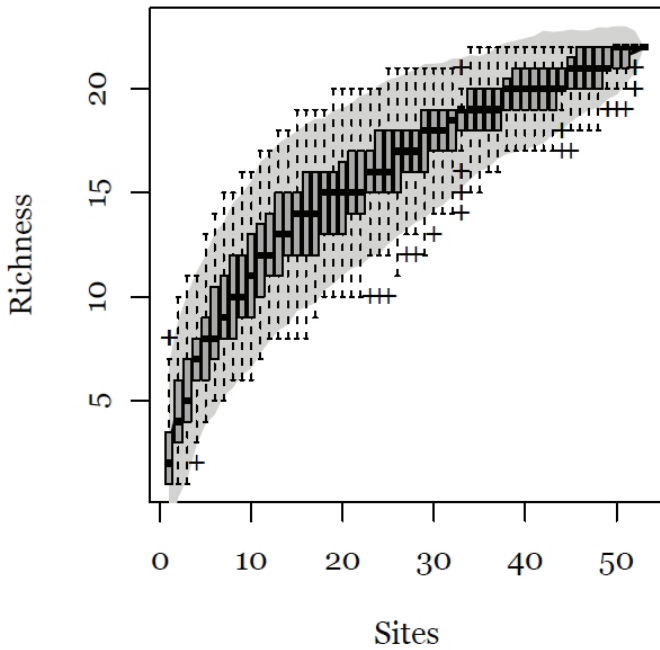


Figure 2. Mean (\pm standard deviation) species accumulation curve of termite species collected in sugarcane plantations of 53 cities in the state of São Paulo, Brazil.

Figure 3. Species abundance distribution curve showing a Mandelbrot model distribution of termite species collected in sugarcane plantation in 53 cities of the state of São Paulo, Brazil.

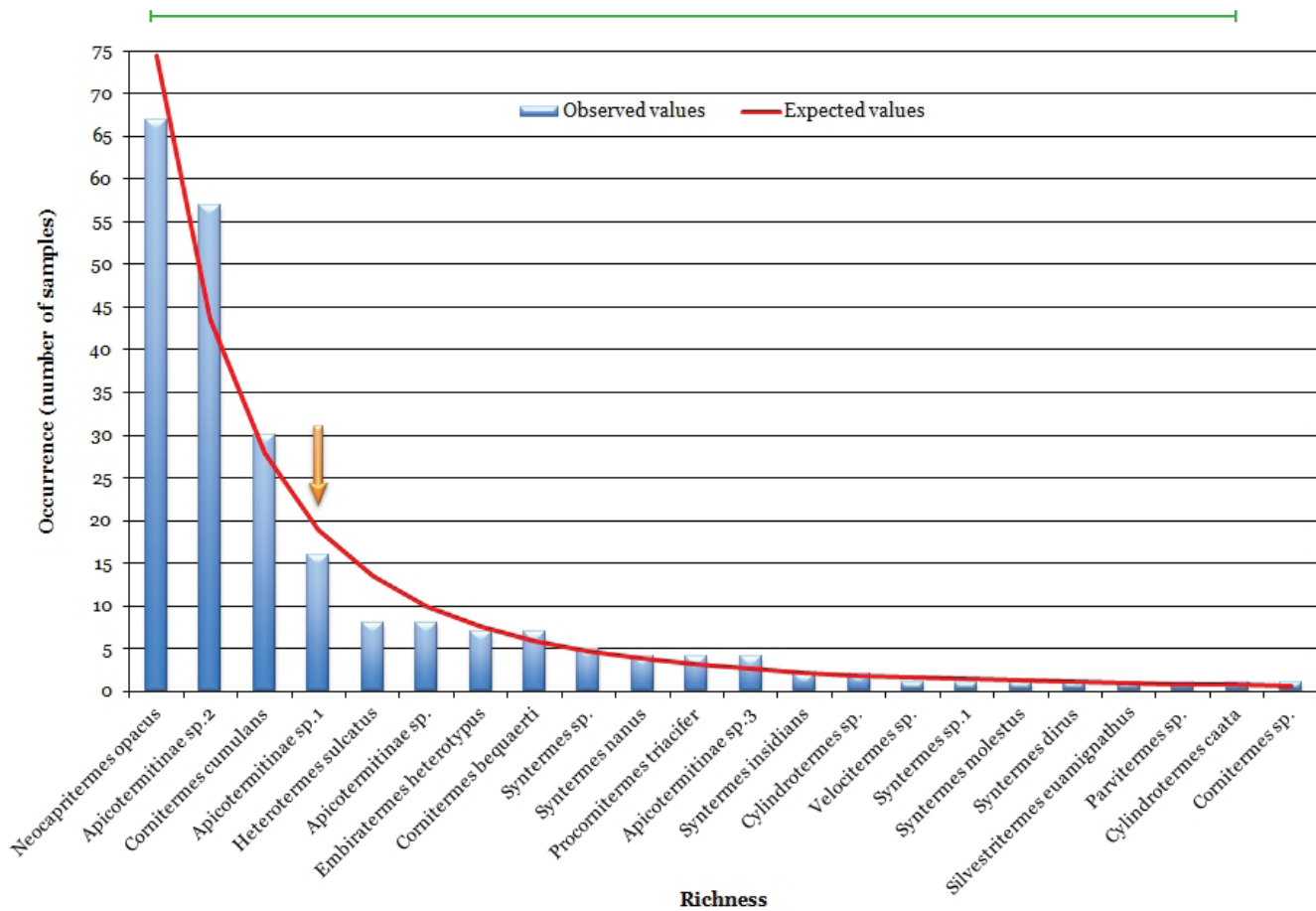


Figure 4. Occurrence of termites (number of samples) in sugarcane plantations in 53 cities of the state of São Paulo. Observed and expected values according to Zipf-Mandelbrot model for the 22 taxa collected. The dashed arrow indicates the inflection point of the curve. Species at the left side were classified as common, and those at the right side were classified as rare.

- Subfamily Termitinae: *N. opacus* (29.26%) was the most frequent among the common species. This species occurs from Ecuador to eastern Argentina and southern Brazil (KRISHNA & ARAUJO 1968; CONSTANTINO 1998), it feeds on wood on the floor (CONSTANTINO 1999) and is considered a pest in *Eucalyptus* (reviewed in CONSTANTINO 2002b; CONSTANTINO 2014) and sugarcane plantations (CHEAVEGATTI-GIANOTTO *et al.* 2011). Thus, the Brazilian System of Phytosanitary Agrochemicals (AGROFIT 2012) recommends up to

12 possible options chemicals to control this species in sugarcane plantations.

- Subfamily Syntermitinae: *C. cumulans* was common, with frequency of occurrence of 13.10%. The genus *Comitermes* is widely distributed in South America, occurring from the Amazon basin to southern Brazil, extending to Paraguay and northeastern Argentina (EMERSON 1952; CONSTANTINO 1998). Most species build epigeal nests, but some live in

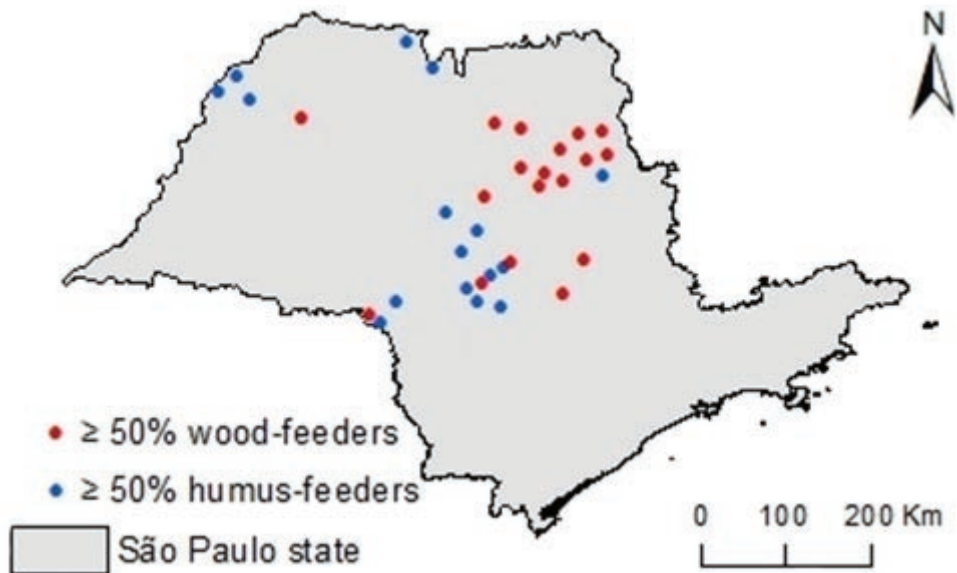
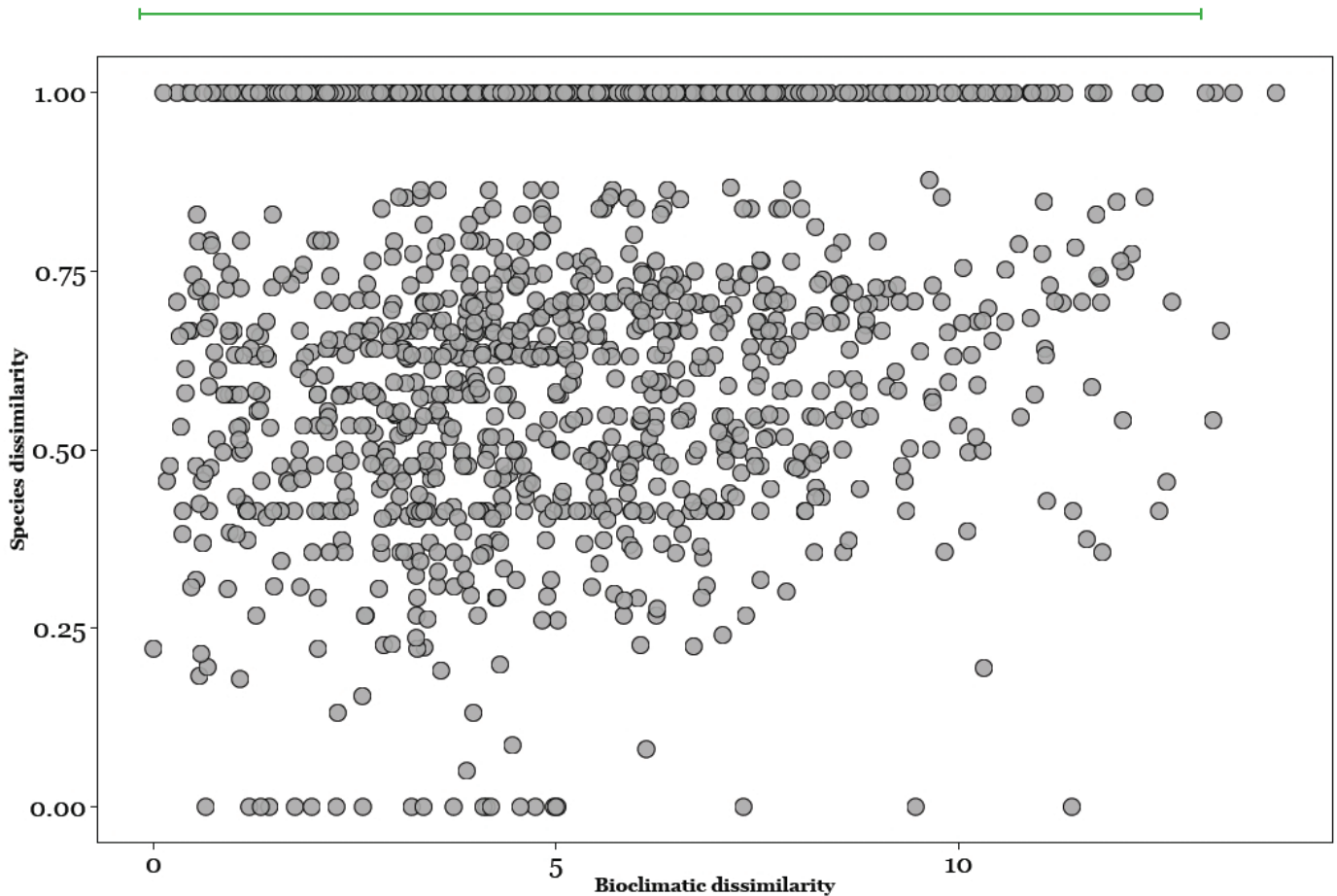


Figure 5. Geographical distribution of cities sampled in the state São Paulo showing the distribution of functional groups of termites, with $\geq 50\%$ of wood-feeders and humus-feeders.



underground nests (CONSTANTINO 1999). It feeds on plant material and it is often found in pastures (CZEPAK *et al.* 2003; CUNHA *et al.* 2006; VALÉRIO 2006; CARRILHO *et al.* 2009), which are usually a homogeneous environment with no competitors (CUNHA & MORAIS 2010). *Cornitermes* has been suggested to reduce grazing areas for livestock in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul (DIEHL *et al.* 2005; FERNANDES *et al.* 1998). However, other studies (CZEPAK *et al.* 2003; ACKERMAN 2007) found that their epigeal nests are not harmful, since they do not reduce the grazing area. Nonetheless, this genus is considered a pest in sugarcane plantations (reviewed in CONSTANTINO 2002b; CHEAVEGATTI-GIANOTTO *et al.* 2011), and whose chemical control is recommended by AGROFIT (2012). Two other genera of this subfamily, *Procornitermes* and

Syntermes, were rare in this study, although some authors have found that they might be pest in other cultures. *Procornitermes* occurs from southern Amazon, across Central Brazil and Bolivia to northern Argentina (CANCELLO 1986) and its occurrence seems to be limited by climatic factors in northern South America (EMERSON 1952). However, some species of this genus are considered pests in sugarcane, such as *Procornitermes triacifer* Silvestri (CHEAVEGATTI-GIANOTTO *et al.* 2011; AGROFIT 2012; COSTANTINO 2002b) and *Procornitermes striatus* (Hagen) (AGROFIT 2012). The genus *Syntermes* of the same subfamily was considered rare in this study. It occurs from northern South America to northern and northeastern Argentina, east of the Andes (CONSTANTINO 1998) and feeds mainly on litter, being

considered a pest in sugarcane, *Eucalyptus*, rice plantations, and pastures (reviewed in COSNTANTINO 2002b). A previous study (MIRANDA *et al.* 2004) recorded *Syntermes nanus* Constantino in sugarcane plantations in northeastern Brazil. However, the frequency of leaves attack does not cause significant losses.

- Family Rhinotermitidae: The only Rhinotermitidae species recorded by us was *H. sulcatus*, which had a low occurrence frequency and was considered rare. The genus *Heterotermes* occurs from southern Mexico, including the Bahamas and West Indies, to northern Argentina, but *H. tenuis* has a wide distribution throughout South America (CONSTANTINO 1998, 2001). It feeds on living or dead plant material, having been considered pest in several crops, mainly sugarcane and timber (HAIFIG *et al.* 2008). A previous study in São Paulo (ALMEIDA & ALVES 1999) considered *H. tenuis* as the main pest in sugarcane plantations due to its wide distribution and high abundance. The estimated damage caused by this species can reach US\$ 500/ha (GARCIA 2004), including chemical control, for which up to 42 possible options chemicals can be used (AGROFIT 2012). The low occurrence frequency of *H. sulcatus* we found (3.5%) may indicate a decline in its abundance due to the continuous use of insecticides over the last decade, which is interesting for commercial crops.

The remaining 18 taxa of termites collected in the sugarcane plantations of São Paulo and to samples were categorized as rare. However, we suggest that termite regional fauna should be maintained. According to OLIVEIRA & DEL-CLARO (2005) and DEL-CLARO (2008) interspecific ecological relationships and overlapping of niches are important for the maintenance of populations at low levels. CARRILLO *et al.* (2009) showed that habitat simplification in the “Cerrado” led to extinction of termite populations as well as other members of the fauna and flora for the loss of specific features due to the application of pesticides. According to SINGH & SINGH (2001) the abundance and composition of termite’s community respond differently to environments and insecticide use.

The influence of climatic variables on termite occurrence in sugarcane plantations. Environmental variables, such as altitude, temperature, and rainfall, besides local vegetation structure and complexity influence termite communities (COLLINS 1980; GATHORNE-HARDY *et al.* 2001; DAVIES 2002; INOUE *et al.* 2006; JONES & EGGLETON 2011). However, it is difficult to generalize distribution patterns of termites in South America (JONES & EGGLETON 2011), because collections and studies are concentrated on a few regions of Guyana and Brazil, especially Amazonia, São Paulo, and Mato Grosso. Furthermore, a previous study (DIEHL *et al.* 2014) suggests a positive relationship between species occurrence and altitude in different geomorphological regions of Rio Grande do Sul state in southern Brazil. However, their results were inconclusive due to the low number of collections in the state.

Here, climate variables influenced the distribution of four common taxa: *N. opacus* (wood-feeder), Apicotermitinae sp. 1 and 2 (humus-feeder), and *C. cumulans* (grass-litter feeder), but none of the 18 rare taxa. However, only humus-feeders and

grass-litter feeders were affected when we tested the influence of climatic variables on functional groups. Wood-feeders were not affected and intermediates were not tested due to low sample size.

There are many controversies about functional group classification of *N. opacus*. It was considered here a wood-feeder, but it has been defined as intermediate feeder by CONSTANTINO (2002), wood-feeder by REZENDE (2012), and wood/humus-feeder by SOUZA *et al.* (2012). This species has been found feeding on trees, trunks and roots, with soil nests in the Brazilian Cerrado (MATHEWS 1977). Some authors (e.g., SLEAFORD *et al.* 1996; DONOVAN *et al.* 2001) suggest that termite diet is distributed along a gradient of humification, from living timber to humus. This could explain the assignment of *N. opacus* to different functional groups, especially because the species behavior in some studies cited was based on field observations. Additionally, this would explain why the distribution of this species here was influenced by environmental variables, when tested along with rare species, when the reverse was true when tested clumped with wood-feeders.

A previous study (ACKERMAN *et al.* 2009) found a high frequency of occurrence of humus-feeders (57%) in less diverse agroforests and primary forests in Central Amazonia, suggesting that the ability of agroforests to support populations of humus-feeders could potentially have a positive effect on soil fertility in agroecosystems. Conversely, MIRANDA *et al.* (2004) did not record humus-feeders in a sugarcane plantation in Northeastern Brazil.

Another study (PALIN *et al.* 2011) along an Amazon-Andes altitudinal gradient in Peru found that the diversity declined with increased elevation. However, functional groups responded differently to the upper distribution limit. For example, the distribution limit for humus-feeders was between 925 and 1,500 m asl, while for wood-feeders it was between 1,550 and 1,850 m asl. This pattern suggested that energy requirements of each group are a key factor shaping species occurrence associated with altitude and temperature.

The model that best fitted the species abundance distribution was Zipf-Mandelbrot. Following WILSON (1991) the presence of a species in this model depends on the previous physical condition and previous species presence. Specifically, pioneer species, requiring little previous conditions. Late successional species need more energy, time, and organization of the ecosystem before they can invade, justifying why these species are rare. These differences between pioneer and late successional species give a Zipf-Mandelbrot distribution.

Finally, it seems that continued use of insecticides had possibly reduced the abundance of some pest species, which are now rare, such as those of the genus *Heterotermes*. Contrarily to other studies, our results suggest that most termite species recorded is potentially beneficial for sugarcane plantations, given the high incidence of humus-feeders. We then reinforce the importance of associating ecology research to agricultural systems and pest control methods and suggest an in-depth Integrated Pest Management (IPM) analysis based on data on damage/injury coupled with cost/benefits of control.

Appendix 1. Geographic coordinates of the cities with sugarcane plantations sampled in the state of São Paulo.

City	Geographic coordinates	City	Geographic coordinates
Altinópolis	21°01'33"S; 47°22'26"W	Luís Antônio	21°33'18"S; 47°42'14"W
Araras	22°21'25"S; 47°23'02"W	Mineiros do Tietê	22°24'32"S; 48°27'03"W
Areiópolis	22°40'04"S; 48°39'54"W	Motuca	21°30'28"S; 48°09'03"W
Bariri	22°04'26"S; 48°44'24"W	Nova Europa	21°46'40"S; 48°33'39"W
Barra Bonita	22°29'42"S; 48°33'28"W	Ourinhos	22°58'44"S; 49°52'15"W
Barrinha	21°11'38"S; 48°09'50"W	Paulo de Faria	20°01'51"S; 49°22'58"W
Bebedouro	20°56'56"S; 48°28'44"W	Pederneiras	22°21'07"S; 48°46'30"W
Boraceia	22°11'34"S; 48°46'44"W	Pereira Barreto	20°38'16"S; 51°06'32"W
Botucatu	22°53'09"S; 48°26'42"W	Piracicaba	22°43'30"S; 47°38'56"W
Brodósqui	20°59'27"S; 47°39'32"W	Pitangueiras	21°00'32"S; 48°13'19"W
Cajuru	21°16'30"S; 47°18'14"W	Pradópolis	21°21'32"S; 48°03'57"W
Chavantes	23°02'20"S; 49°42'32"W	Pratânia	22°48'28"S; 48°39'57"W
Cordeirópolis	22°28'55"S; 47°27'25"W	Quatá	22°14'52"S; 50°41'52"W
Cravinhos	21°20'24"S; 47°43'44"W	Rancharia	22°13'44"S; 50°53'34"W
Dois Córregos	22°21'57"S; 48°22'48"W	Ribeirão Preto	21°10'40"S; 47°48'36"W
Guariba	21°21'36"S; 48°13'40"W	Rincão	21°35'13"S; 48°04'15"W
Guataporá	21°29'49"S; 48°02'16"W	Rio Claro	22°24'39"S; 47°33'39"W
Iacanga	21°53'24"S; 49°01'30"W	Santa Cruz do Rio Pardo	22°53'56"S; 49°37'58"W
Icém	20°20'31"S; 49°11'42"W	Santa Rosa do Viterbo	21°28'22"S; 47°21'46"W
Igaraçu do Tietê	22°30'32"S; 48°33'28"W	Santo Antônio da Alegria	21°05'13"S; 47°09'03"W
Ilha Solteira	22°30'32"S; 48°33'28"W	São Manuel	22°43'51"S; 48°34'15"W
Ipaussu	23°03'25"S; 49°37'33"W	São Pedro Turvo	22°44'49"S; 49°44'24"W
Iracemápolis	22°34'51"S; 47°31'08"W	São Simão	21°28'44"S; 47°33'03"W
Itapura	20°38'45"S; 51°30'32"W	Serra Azul	21°18'39"S; 47°33'57"W
Jaú	22°17'45"S; 48°33'28"W	Serrana	21°12'39"S; 47°35'45"W
Leme	22°11'09"S; 47°23'24"W	Tabatinga	21°43'01"S; 48°41'16"W
Lençóis Paulista	22°35'56"S; 48°48'00"W		

Appendix 2. List of macroclimatic variables obtained from World Clim (<http://www.worldclim.org>)

Macroclimatic variables	
BIO1	Annual Mean Temperature
BIO2	Mean Diurnal Range (Mean of monthly (max temp - min temp))
BIO3	Isothermality (BIO2/BIO7) (* 100)
BIO4	Temperature Seasonality (standard deviation *100)
BIO5	Max Temperature of Warmest Month
BIO6	Min Temperature of Coldest Month
BIO7	Temperature Annual Range (BIO5-BIO6)
BIO8	Mean Temperature of Wettest Quarter
BIO9	Mean Temperature of Driest Quarter
BIO10	Mean Temperature of Warmest Quarter
BIO11	Mean Temperature of Coldest Quarter
BIO12	Annual Precipitation
BIO13	Precipitation of Wettest Month
BIO14	Precipitation of Driest Month
BIO15	Precipitation Seasonality (Coefficient of Variation)
BIO16	Precipitation of Wettest Quarter
BIO17	Precipitation of Driest Quarter
BIO18	Precipitation of Warmest Quarter
BIO19	Precipitation of Coldest Quarter

Appendix 3. Cities in the states of São Paulo, Brazil, whose sugarcane plantations had a frequency of occurrence $\geq 50\%$ for humus-feeders and wood-feeders.

Frequency of occurrence of functional groups of termites		
$\geq 50\%$ humus-feeders		$\geq 50\%$ wood-feeders
Bariri		Altinópolis
Botucatu		Areiopólis
Chavantes		Bebedouro
Iacanga		Brodósqui
Icem		Cajuru
Igaraçu do Tietê		Dois Córregos
Ilha Solteira		Guariba
Itapura		Guatapara
Lençóis Paulista		Luis Antônio
Mineiros do Tietê		Ourinhos
Paulo de Faria		Piracicaba
Pederneiras		Pitangueiras
Pereira Barreto		Ribeirão Preto
Pratânia		Rincão
Santa Cruz do Rio Pardo		Rio Claro
Santa Rosa do Viterbo		Santo Antônio da Alegria
		Serra Azul
		Tabatinga

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank “Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Campinas” for providing working space and research grants. “Centro de Tecnologia Canavieira” and the plantation owners allowed access to their land. Technicians helped in fieldwork and undergrad biology students from “PUC-Campinas” helped in sample sorting. SISBIO provided collecting license (#12205-1). People from “Laboratório de Isoptera of the Museu de Zoologia of the Universidade de São Paulo” (MZUSP), especially Dr. Eliana M. Canello and Dr. Maurício M. Rocha, helped with species identification. Thiago Gonçalves-Souza provided useful statistical advice and commented on a previous version of this manuscript. Diogo B. Provete reviewed the English language. Elena Diehl critically read the first draft.

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Received in: 01/20/2015

Accepted in: 05/13/2015

Suggested citation:

Junqueira, L.K., E.R. Gonçalves & L.M.C. Teixeira, 2015. Termite Communities in Sugarcane Plantations in Southeastern Brazil: an Ecological Approach *EntomoBrasilis*, 8 (2): 105–116.

Available in: [doi:10.12741/ebrasilis.v8i2.502](https://doi.org/10.12741/ebrasilis.v8i2.502)

