

LEVELED BOOK • N

Awesome Ants



Written by Rus Buyok

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Awesome Ants

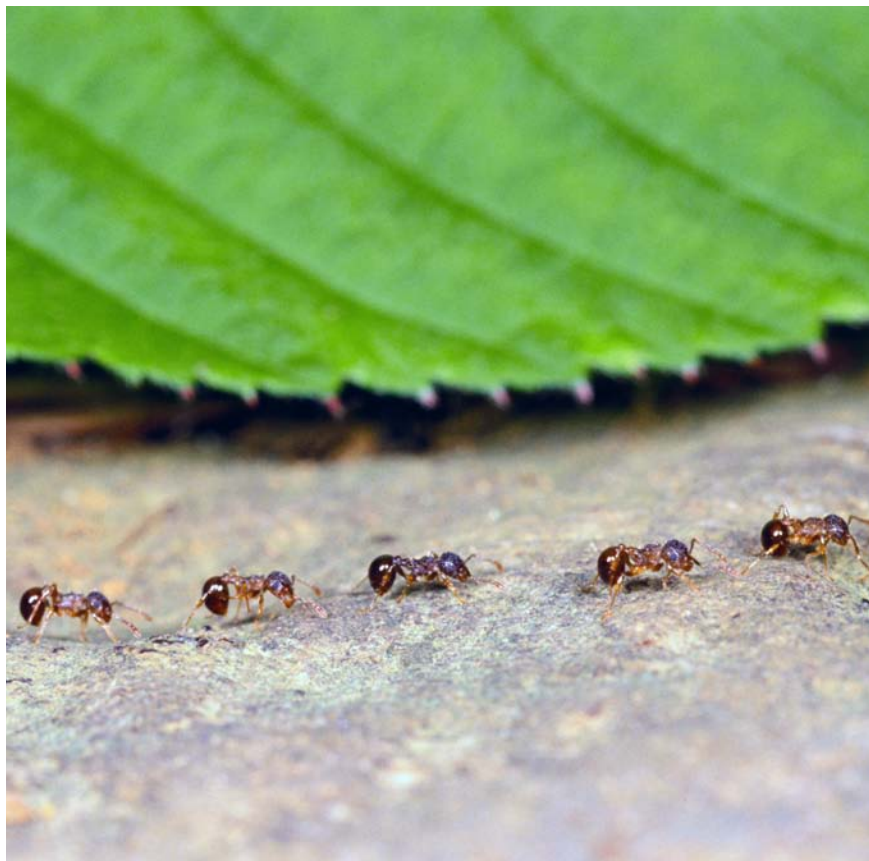
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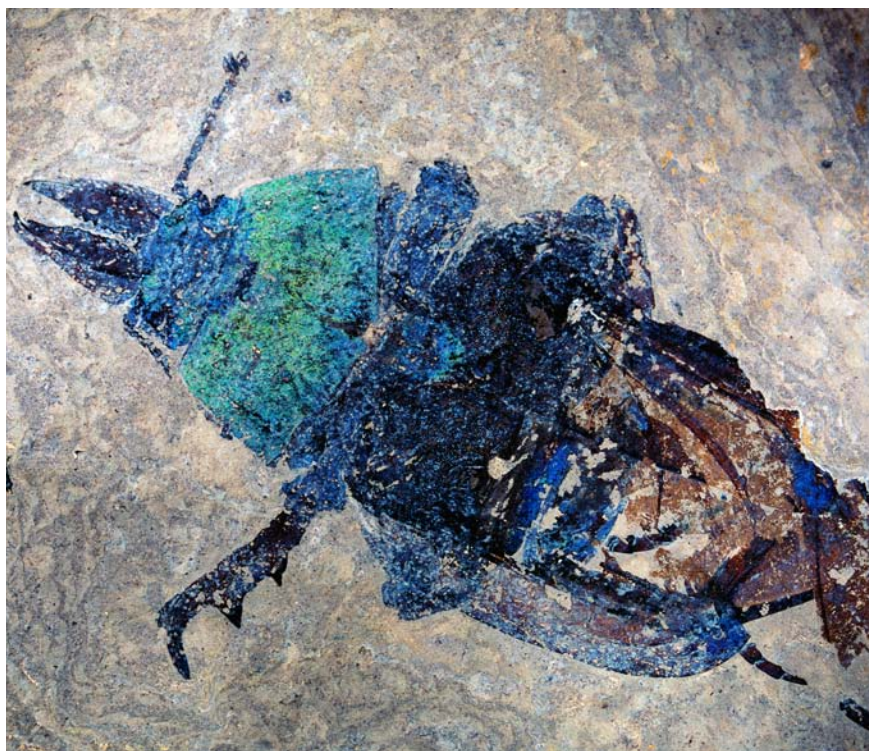
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Ants are always on the move.

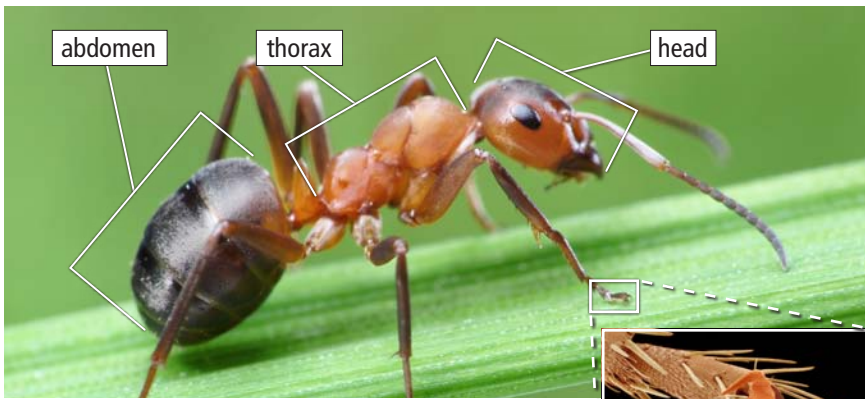
A Little History

You've seen them marching through grass and across sidewalks. You may have even seen them crawling over your kitchen counter. We're talking about ants—tiny, strong, awesome ants.



This fossil of a giant male ant is over 49 million years old.

Ants are about 100 million years old. They were crawling around under the dinosaurs! Between then and now, they've changed a lot. Today, over 10,000 **species** of ants live on every continent except Antarctica. They have been able to survive so long because of their bodies and how they live.



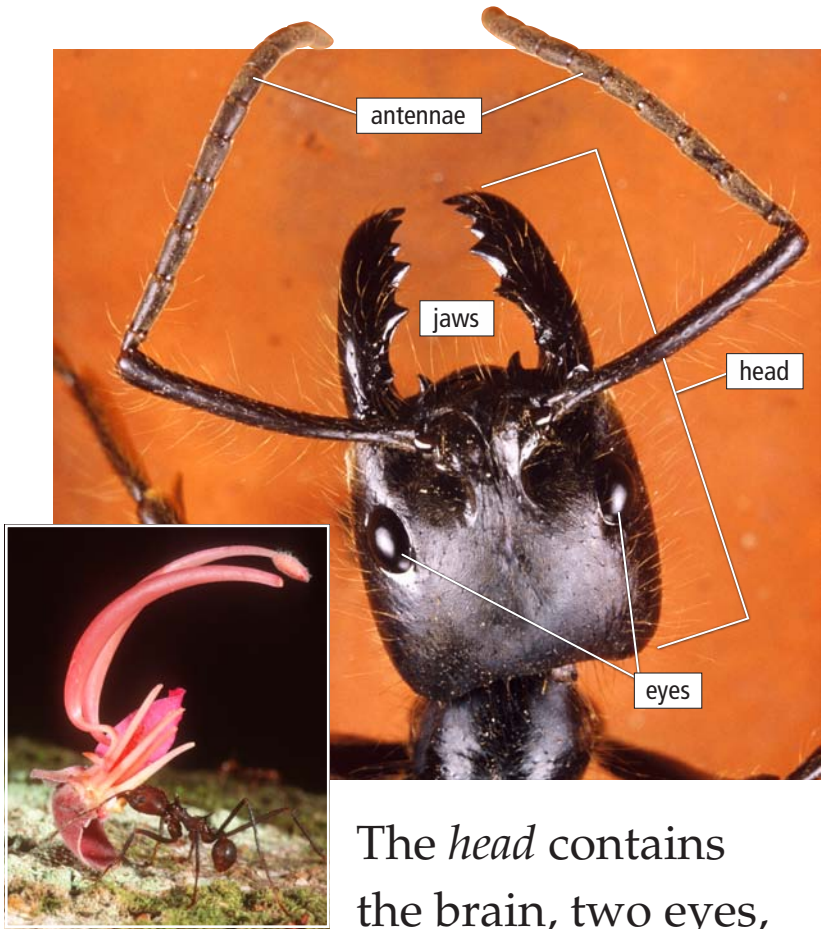
An ant's leg seen through a microscope shows the hooks it uses to climb.



Body Parts

Like all insects, ants have six legs and three body parts. The back part of their body is the *abdomen*. This part holds the heart and stomach. Some ants have stingers that they use to protect themselves.

Their three pairs of legs attach to the middle part, called the *thorax*. Each leg has little hooks that allow ants to climb almost anything. Ants can even hear with their legs by feeling **vibrations** through the ground.

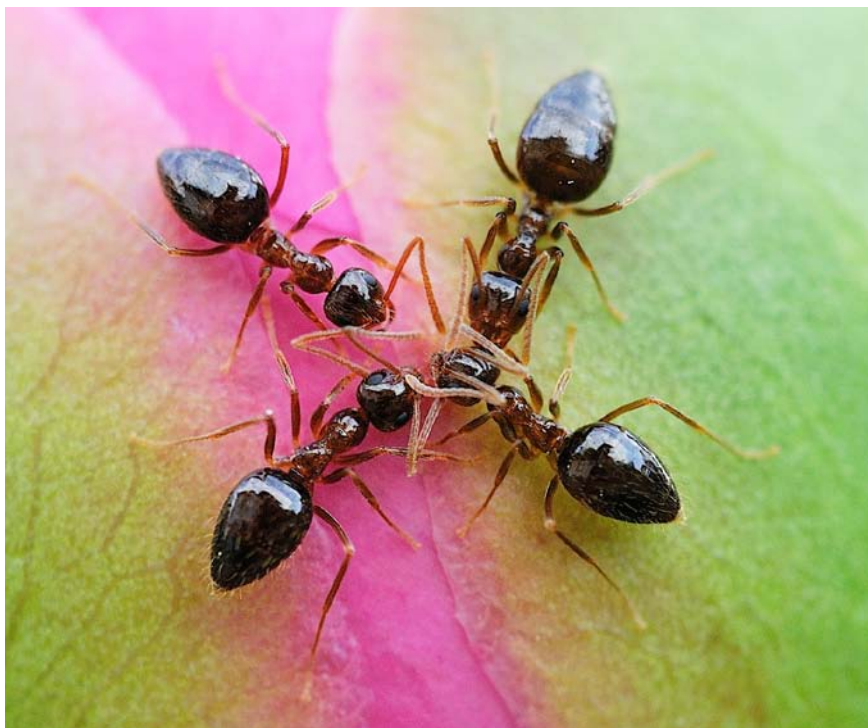


The *head* contains the brain, two eyes, **antennae**, and jaws. The jaws open and close like scissors. They are used for cutting and carrying things. Ants can lift more than twenty times their own weight. Ants also have other mouthparts for chewing food and drinking.



Ants use their antennae to taste a grape.

The two eyes are each made up of many smaller eyes. Even though ants have so many eyes, they can't see very well. Instead, they use their antennae to get around. The antennae are like all-in-one sense machines. Ants use them to taste, smell, hear, and **communicate** with other ants through touching. The long, thin antennae are always moving around.



Four ants use their antennae to communicate.

Let's Talk

Ants communicate with each other in three ways: touch, sound, and smell. Ants touch each other with their antennae in different ways to send different messages. They can also make noises to communicate by rubbing their legs together or on their bodies.



Leafcutter ants carry leaves that weigh far more than the ants back to their colony.

The main way ants communicate is by smell. They release chemicals that other ants can smell long after the first ant is gone. Different smells send different messages. For example, a crushed ant releases chemicals that attract other ants. The chemicals also make the other ants attack anything nearby that might be a danger. An ant that has found food will lay down a trail of chemicals for other ants to follow. The trail allows them to find the food and return to the **colony**.

One Big, Happy Family

Ant colonies are filled with activity. Usually built underground, they have many different rooms, which all have different uses. Some rooms store food, while others are used to care for the young. Colonies even have rooms for ants to relax in.



This cast shows the upper part of a large ant colony. Scientists think this colony went over 12 meters (39 ft) into the ground.



Soldier ants are usually much larger than worker ants.

Within the colony, every ant has a job. Worker ants and soldier ants find food and protect the nest.

These are usually the ants you see above the ground. Other ants build



What About the Boys?

Male ants have only one purpose in most colonies: to mate with the queen. Once they've done their duty, most male ants simply die.

the nest, take care of the young, and do other jobs. All these ants are female, but only one is allowed to lay eggs: the queen. In other words, all the ants in a colony are **related**.



Many smaller ants spend their lives caring for the queen.

The Queen

The queen is the leader of the colony. The largest of all the ants, queens are egg-laying machines. Some queens can lay thousands of eggs every day. They can also live longer than any other insect—over twenty-five years.

I Can Fly!

Some young queens have wings that they use to fly off and start new colonies. The wings fall off when the queens start laying eggs. Some males can also fly. When they land near a colony, worker ants rip the wings off. Then they rush the male to the queen so the two can mate before the male dies.





Let's Go Floating

Not even water can stop some ants. They climb on top of each other and link their legs until they form a raft or bridge made of their own bodies.

Yep, Ants Are Awesome

Ants may be small, but they can do awesome things. Thousands or millions of ants working together can build bridges or float across rivers. They can overpower animals hundreds of times their own size for food.



A trail usually means the ants are moving to a new home—or they've found something very tasty.

So the next time you come across a trail of ants, stop and watch or, better yet, follow them. When you see what these little gals are capable of, you'll understand just how awesome they are.

Glossary

- antennae** (*n.*) the thin feelers found on the heads of some animals that help them touch and smell (p. 7)
- colony** (*n.*) a group of animals that live together; a place where a group of ants or certain other social insects live (p. 10)
- communicate** (*v.*) to make thoughts or ideas known using words, pictures, or other means (p. 8)
- related** (*adj.*) in the same family (p. 12)
- species** (*n.*) a group of living things that are similar and can reproduce (p. 5)
- vibrations** (*n.*) small, rapid, back-and-forth or side-to-side movements (p. 6)

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