

The Lives of Ants

by Elizabeth Dana Jaffe



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Ants Are Everywhere

You are having a picnic by a peaceful pond. The branches of the nearby trees sway in the warm breeze. You throw bread to the birds, who snatch it up with their beaks. Everything is perfect ... except that now there are ants everywhere. They are busy searching for food. Your food!

Ants often look for food at picnics, even if they aren't invited!



Ants live almost everywhere, except on the continent of Antarctica. There are about 12,000 kinds of ants. They are black, blue, brown, red, yellow, green, and even purple!

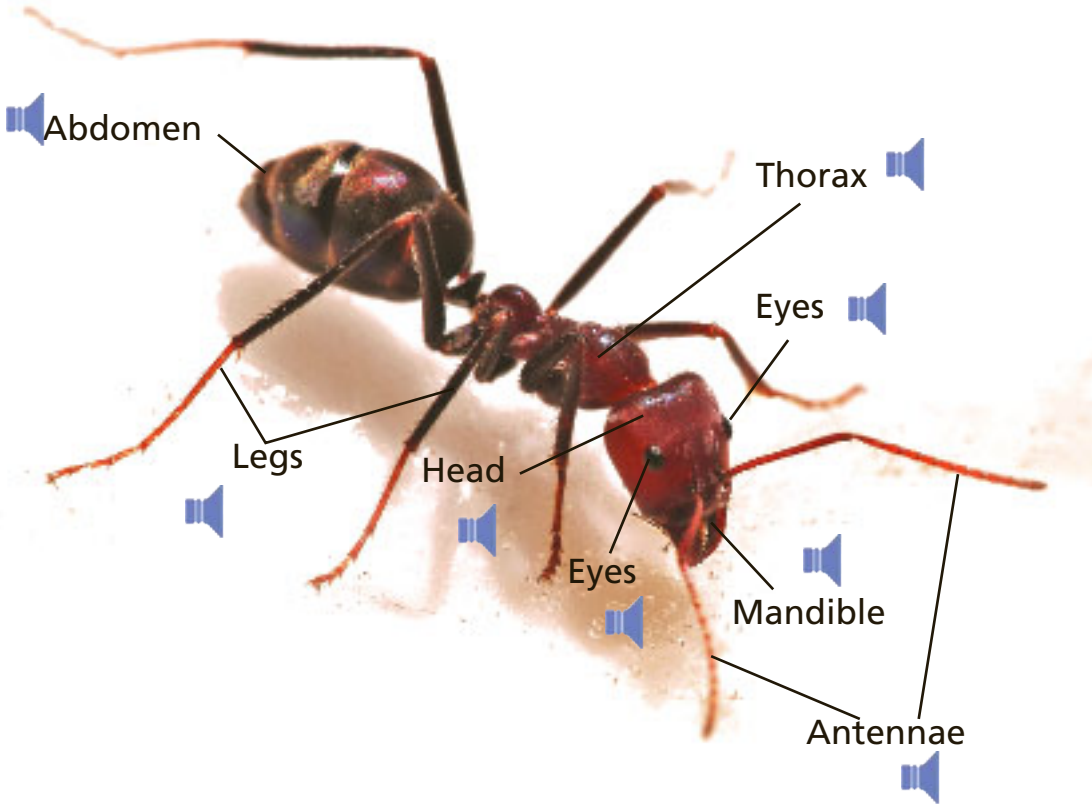
Most ants are tiny—between 1/16 of an inch and one inch long. Even though ants are some of the smallest animals, they are also some of the strongest. They can lift 50 times their own weight. That's like a person lifting up a car!

The thief ant is one of the smallest ants.
The bulldog ant is one of the largest ants.



🔊 An Ant's Body

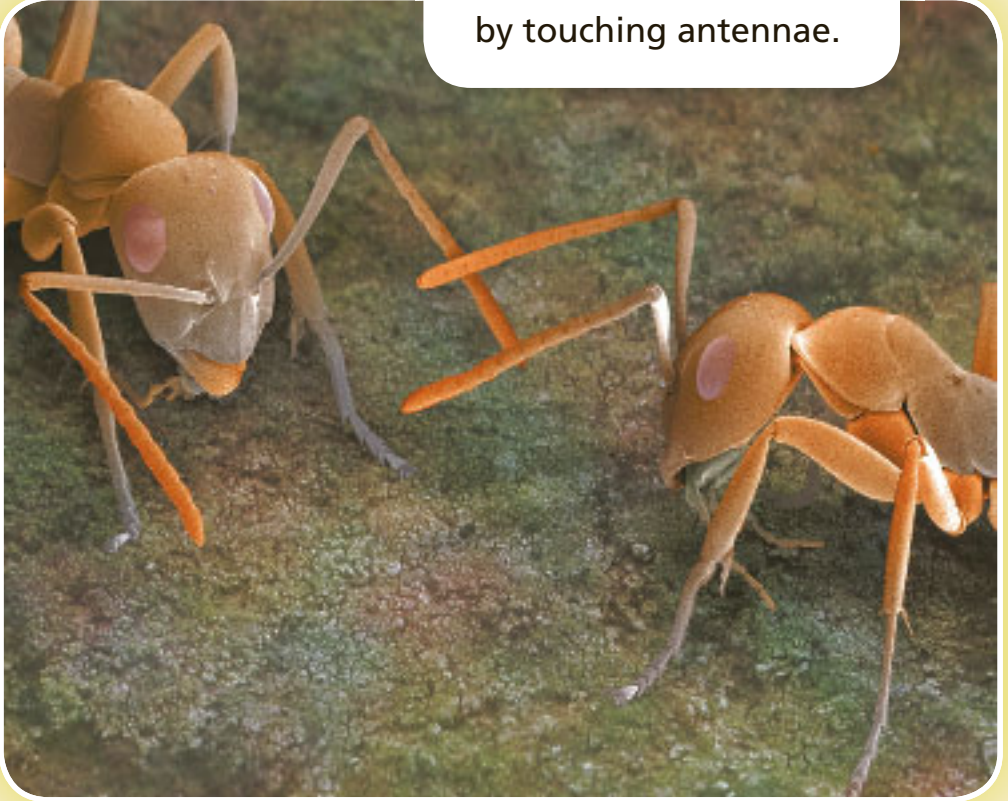
Like all insects, an ant has six legs and three body parts: the head, the abdomen, and the thorax. An ant has two eyes that sense motion. It has a sharp lower jaw called the mandible that cuts, tears, digs, and carries things.



When an ant waves its antennae around, it notices any smells hanging in the air. Ants also use their antennae to taste and touch things. And that's not all! Ants touch antennae to talk to each other.



Ants talk to each other by touching antennae.



🔊 Homes in the Ground

Ants work and live together. They build underground cities, called ant colonies. These colonies are made up of rooms called chambers. The colony may have hundreds of rooms, connected by **winding** tunnels that go **deep** into the ground.

🔊 The ants make the tunnels and chambers by digging. They scoop up the dirt with their jaws, carry it outside, and drop it to make an anthill. They make holes in the hill to use as doors.

🔊 An ant colony has many tunnels and chambers.



As the number of ants in the colony grows, worker ants dig more tunnels and chambers. They dig new chambers to store eggs and larvae, to store food, and to rest in.

Ants need to keep their bodies moist. They are always digging tunnels and chambers deeper and deeper to get to the damp earth.

Ants are always digging to make room for new ants. They also dig to find damp earth.



Queens, Drones, and Workers

Some colonies have just a few ants. Other colonies have millions of ants. Whether it's big or small, every colony has three types of ants: the queen ant, the drone (male) ant, and the worker ant.

Each ant colony begins with a young queen ant. A young queen ant has wings. On a wet summer day, the queen will fly in the air, surrounded by flying drones. When the queen comes back to the ground, she **breaks** off her wings by rubbing them on the ground. Then she starts digging a hole in the wet earth to form a chamber. Here she lays her eggs. This is the beginning of a new ant colony.

Queen



Drone



Ants go through four growing stages: egg, larva, pupa, and adult. First, the egg is laid. It hatches into a larva. The larva is fed and cleaned. The larva then surrounds itself with a silk cocoon. This is the pupa stage.


The pupa turns into an ant. Then it breaks open the cocoon and comes out. The new ant is pale and soft. In a few hours, its outer shell will get hard and dark.

Worker



Working Together

In an ant colony, different groups of worker ants do different jobs. One group takes care of the queen. Another group takes care of the queen's eggs. These ants bring the eggs to the nursery chambers and care for them there.

 The queen ant may lay 100,000 eggs in her lifetime.



Another group of worker ants, called foragers, search for food for the colony. These ants look for seeds, other insects, and fruit or bread from a picnic.

When they find food, forager ants take it back to the colony. On the way, they make a trail by rubbing their abdomens on the ground. They leave a smell that leads from the colony back to the food. Other worker ants can find their way to the food by following the trail.

Forager ants carry food back to the colony.



After worker ants bring food back to the colony, different groups of ants prepare the food. If they are eating seeds, one group of ants removes the husks. Another group carries the husks out to the colony's trash pile. Then some ants feed juice from the seeds to each larva. Other workers take the extra seeds and store them in a chamber to eat later.

Ants also collect sweet juices in their mouths to feed other adult ants. One ant feeds another ant by putting drops of juice in its mouth.

When one ant feeds another ant, it looks like they are kissing!



Another group of worker ants, called soldier ants, protects the colony from enemies, such as spiders, lizards, anteaters, and ants from other colonies.

Soldier ants sometimes stand at the entrance to the colony. They use their antennae to notice the different **shapes** and smells that come near. When enemies approach, soldier ants will fight them, biting with their sharp jaws. Some soldier ants spray poison at the enemies.

Soldier ants watch for enemies and protect the colony.



🔊 An ant colony is a community of ants. Every ant does its job to help the whole colony. There is no boss, but all the ants work hard to help one another. By working together, the ants make sure that their colony lives and grows.

🔊 Next time you see ants at your picnic, don't get upset. Admire their teamwork!

🔊 Ants work together to move a larva to a safer place.



Responding



TARGET SKILL Text and Graphic

Features What makes the photos in this book useful? Pick three photos and explain what they show the reader. Copy and complete the chart below.

Photos	Page	What They Show
Thief and bulldog ants	3	Shows different sizes of ants
?	?	?
?	?	?
?	?	?



Write About It

Text to World You read about ant colonies. What other animal homes do you know about? Write a paragraph that summarizes another animal's home. Remember that a summary includes only the most important details.



TARGET VOCABULARY

beaks

branches

break

deepest

hang

pond

shaped

winding

EXPAND YOUR VOCABULARY

antennae

chambers

colonies

drone

nursery



TARGET SKILL

Text and Graphic

Features Tell how words go with photos.



TARGET STRATEGY

Question

Ask questions about what you are reading.



GENRE Informational text gives facts about a topic.

Level: 0

DRA: 38

Genre:

Informational Text

Strategy:

Question

Skill:

Text and Graphic Features

Word Count: 1,054

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