ALL ABOUT ANTS

MEET THE EXPERT

Meet Joyshree, the myrmecologist who is mad about ants.

Why ants?

Joyshree: Well, many reasons! For one, ants are truly social animals just like humans. They live in well-organised colonies. Also, there are so many trillions of ants that their weight would account for about 15–20% of the total weight of all animals on land!

How do I know if I’m looking at an ant or a termite?

Joyshree: Good question. Most of us mistake termites for ants. The differences are illustrated on the right.

Spy on an Ant family

What you need:

Some sugar, a bit of cardboard, a couple of stones and your field diary.

STEP 1:

Find an ant, follow it and locate its colony/nest.

STEP 2:

A metre or so away from the nest (if you don’t find a nest, an ant trail will do), where you see ants wandering about, place the cardboard, weigh it down with the stones and put the sugar on it.

STEP 3:

Note down the following in your field diary:

a. How soon after you place the sugar do the ants find it?
b. Record the number of ants on the site every 2 minutes, for 10 minutes.
c. Do the same with different kinds of food like salt, lemon, green vegetables, a bit of a boiled egg, maybe even a dead insect. If you find a different kind of ant, compare their preferences.

HOW ANTS LIVE

A colony has mostly female ants.

The rest are either workers who go out and find food, tend to the queens’ eggs and young ones.

...or soldiers who specialised in protecting the nest from invaders, clear paths for the workers and help break open hard seeds.

The males (drones) stay inside the nest and wait for the future queens to be born.

The mated princess ant lays her eggs in a safe place and starts a new colony, with herself as the queen.

When the time comes, drones and princess ants all grow wings.

A new colony is born.

They fly out with ants from other colonies and mate.

When the time comes, drones and princess ants all grow wings.

Nests are ruled by one, or sometimes several queens.

They build nests on trees, or underground nests that have tunnels and chambers.

WRITE TO US!

Have you seen an interesting ant family around you? Send us your observations and drawings at edu@ncf-india.org!