

The Acumen of Ants

By Uzziel Maldonado

About Ants

An ant is an insect. Its body has a rigid exoskeleton that has antennae, a head, thorax and abdomen and six legs. The head has powerful mandibles for lifting and biting. The abdomen has a stinger and a poison gland. One of the unique features of ants is that they have two stomachs, a community stomach called a crop, and their personal stomach for their individual well-being. Which brings me to another unique characteristic of ants, namely, that ant colonies are super organisms. Unlike individually minded beings, ants think and act as one.

Proverbs 6:6-8 (NKJV) says “Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest.” So how do ants gather, store and preserve their food so that they can provide during the lean days or months when inclement weather prevents foraging and when food is scarce?

Ants much like other insects vary in size, color, diet, and ability depending on which of the twenty-thousand species one considers. In other words, there are different species of ants and they each gather, store and preserve their food but there are many ways in which this takes place. In this newsletter, I will highlight one important member of the honeypot ant colony (*Myrmecocystus*), the repletes.

About Honeypot Ants

The range of the honeypot ant extends from Oregon and Idaho to as far south as central Mexico. As far west as California and as far east as Texas. Their colonies consist of large and small workers, a queen, male drones and the unique replete and they build their nests underground. Everyone has a role to play and everyone is important. Only the workers go out and forage for food, but they do so in interesting ways. Some workers tend and farm aphids on plants and drink the honeydew. Other workers eat from a fallen fruit or insect. Still others collect fresh water. They communicate their find with each other with their antennae and the use of pheromones. The workers that stay closest to the colony usually have the largest mandibles, ever ready to provide the ultimate sacrifice for the good of the colony. But staying close to the colony has other drawbacks. It means it becomes difficult to feed and secure their own individual needs! The drones, queens and other workers inside have this similar struggle.

In effect the smallest workers that are scouting and constantly looking for food, are usually the best fed. They proudly carry their prized finds back home to share with the rest of their family. They do this by filling their stomach first and then filling their crop, the community stomach next. When they encounter their hungry relatives, they share the good news of where to find food and their contents (food) if the other workers are themselves famished. Eventually, all are fed. That serves for their daily needs but what about their long-term security or emergency? Enter the replete.

The Heroic Replete

The replete is a worker who was set apart from birth by the queen and her maids to act as a living vessel for the good of the community. While their exoskeleton is still flexible the maids feed the larvae large

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portions of food, filling their stomach and stretching their crop. For the rest of their lives, the repletes will live “low and slow,” a safe and quite life, limiting their movement to reduce energy and waste, and ever ready to share what they have stored for their beloved colony. Some repletes store nectar, others store water, still others a mix of food and water. Repletes need the queen and the workers to provide abundant workers, protection and food and the colony needs the repletes when circumstances become critical.

The Adversaries of the Honey-pot Ants

The list of enemies of the honey-pot ants is long. Crows and other birds, spiders, lizards eat the workers. Small mammals and humans eat the repletes. Some people kill the honey-pot ant colony with powders and poisons for the sake of a nice lawn. Last but not least, other ants (including rival honey-pot ants) raid the honey-pot nests, collecting eggs, larvae and the prized replete to enslave the larvae and ever increase their numbers.

Lessons From This Ant

Ants in general are a great object lesson from nature that can teach us many things including how to complete the Great Commission as found in Matthew 28:18-20. The honey-pot ant shows us how all members are important in a colony, even the unseen, cautious and quiet replete. So which member of the honey-pot ants did you find most interesting? Who are you in God’s great super organism, the church? What other lessons did you get from the repletes? Please share your thoughts, comments and concerns with us. Please share this story if you would like! Let us know if you would like to schedule a visit.