

Keep**Texas Wild****AWESOME ANTS**

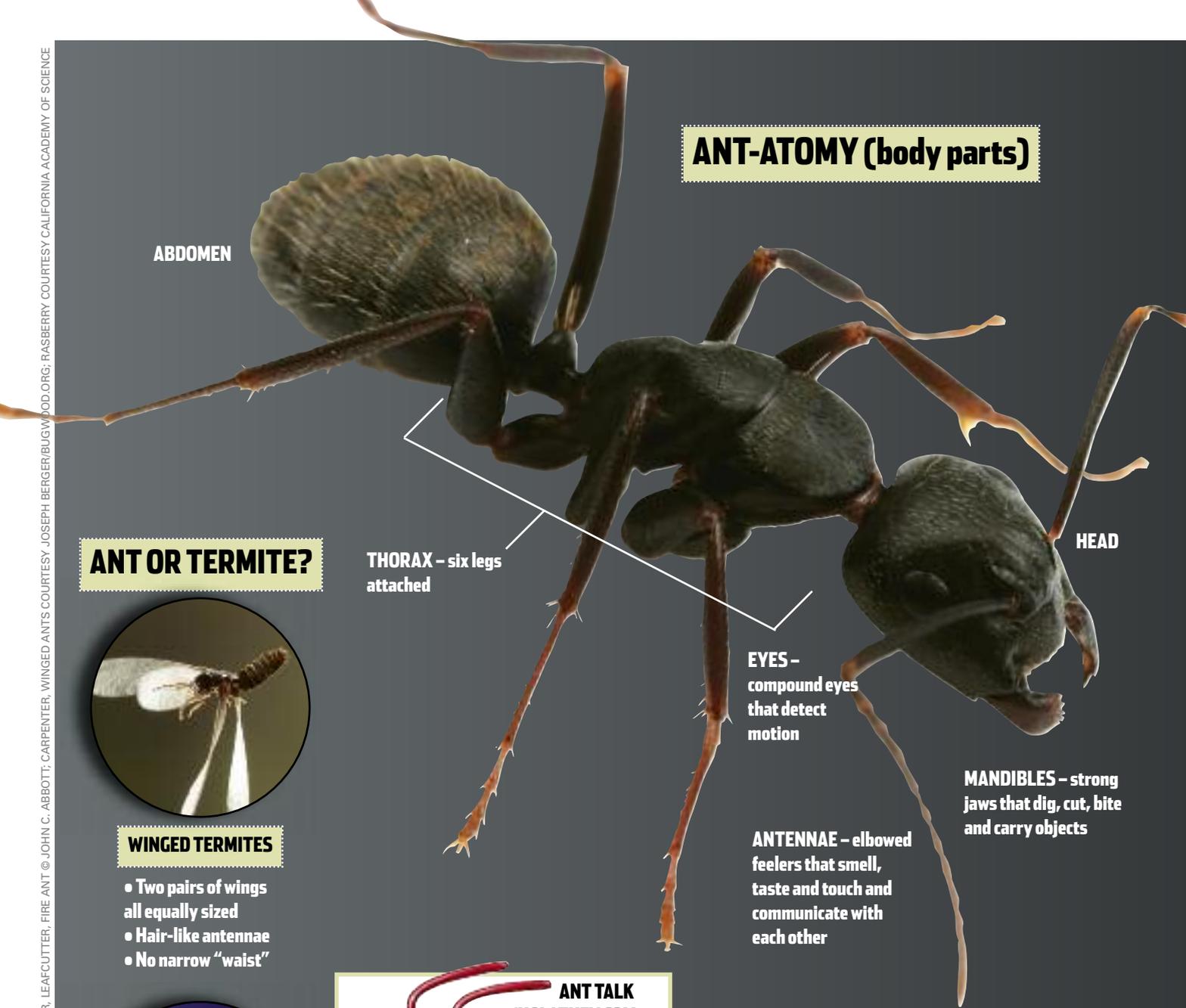
No matter what, these mighty insects work hard as a team.

» TINY BUT TOUGH

Yikes, what's that tickling your arm? An ant! Wait! Before you flick it away, take a close look at one of the most hard-working insects you'll ever meet. Somehow, while searching for food, that little ant found your arm. As a worker ant, her sole purpose in life is to feed and protect her colony. Like some bee and wasp species, ants are "social" insects. That means they work together to make nests and tend the young. They don't live on their own, like a butterfly or beetle. More than 10,000 species of ants inhabit our world, ranging in size from a grain of sand to one-and-a-half inches long. In Texas, more than 250 native species play important roles in our different habitats.

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ANT-ATOMY (body parts)



ABDOMEN

HEAD

THORAX – six legs attached

EYES – compound eyes that detect motion

MANDIBLES – strong jaws that dig, cut, bite and carry objects

ANTENNAE – elbowed feelers that smell, taste and touch and communicate with each other

ANT OR TERMITE?



WINGED TERMITES

- Two pairs of wings all equally sized
- Hair-like antennae
- No narrow “waist”



WINGED ANTS

- Two pairs of wings; hind wings shorter
- Elbowed antennae
- Narrow waist between abdomen and thorax

ANT TALK (HOW THEY COMMUNICATE)

Social insects must share information to survive. Ants tell one another “follow me to food” or “attack!” by laying chemical trails, which they sense through their antennae.

- After flying off and mating, the new queen sheds wings and lays eggs that become female workers that can’t reproduce.
- The queen then lays more eggs, and workers feed her.
- New eggs become more workers, winged males or queens.
- Workers tend brood; males and new winged queens fly off and mate; males die soon after.

LIFE CYCLE



NATIVE SPECIES

PHARAOH ANT (also called sugar ant): Light tan to reddish in color and the smallest species. Nests indoors and outdoors, feeds on sweet and greasy foods. Doesn't usually bite or sting.



CARPENTER ANT: Large black or reddish-black ants with convex abdomens. Nests in wood or decaying trees. Can bite but doesn't sting.



RED HARVESTER ANT: Reddish to dark brown ants with square heads. Gathers seeds and stores in underground nest. Vegetation is often dead in a large circle around main opening. Can bite and sting.



LEAFCUTTING ANT: Rusty brown ants with spines on thorax. Cuts and carries leaves and buds into underground nest. Leaf debris used to grow fungus, which feeds colony. Workers bite.



INVASIVES

RED IMPORTED FIRE ANT: Brown ants that build hills or mounds in open areas. If mound is disturbed, workers quickly attack by both biting and repeatedly stinging.



RASBERRY CRAZY ANT: Small reddish-brown ants that are spreading from Houston area. Crawls fast and nests in huge numbers, usually under things like rocks or pots. Has no stinger but can bite.



ANT-SWERS
How strong are ants?
They can carry 10 to 50 times their weight!

What do ants eat? Most eat live or dead insects, nectar, seeds or fruit.

HOW DO ANTS AFFECT HABITATS AND US?

Depending on the species, ants...

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Control other insect populations Disperse seeds Move soil around Pollinate plants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hurt people allergic to their stings Can damage buildings Can kill crops Spread diseases

ILLUSTRATIONS © FIAN ARROYO



Spike's Activity Page



>> WILD CONSERVATION

DID YOU KNOW THAT OUR STATE REPTILE – THE HORNED LIZARD (ALSO CALLED A HORNY TOAD) – FEEDS PRIMARILY ON HARVESTER ANTS?

Sadly, though, we're slowly losing this special lizard. Why? More shopping centers and neighborhoods mean less habitat for horned lizards. Also, invasive fire ants – which the lizards don't eat – have pushed out harvester ants. What can you do? Encourage your parents and other adults you know to stop using pesticides (or use them sparingly). **IMPORTANT:** If you find harvester ant beds on your property, protect them! Don't kill those ants!



>> WILD SCIENCE

GO ON AN ANT PICNIC!

Set out a paper plate with little bits of different foods, such as breadcrumbs, peanut butter, sugar and banana. Keep an eye on the plate while you eat and play. How long does it take before an ant shows up? When do more arrive? Which foods do they prefer? How big are the pieces they carry away? Where do they go? Can you see the ants communicate with one another? Write about or draw what you see.



>> KEEPING IT WILD

BE OBSERV-ANT and either make your own ant farm or buy one. Go online for directions to make one, using either aquariums, containers or jars (with lids!).



**NEXT MONTH:
Beach Tidings**

TEACHER RESOURCE

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