

to seek another. Fully mature colonies may contain thousands of ants, including males and winged females. Due to the size of some colonies it is assumed that they contain more than one reproductive female. One observer reports that he has found 23 wingless (or apparently fertile) females in a colony.

In the Gulf coast area, males and winged females can be found in numerous nests almost any month of the year. Nuptial flights, however, commonly take place in the spring but have also been observed from late December to late February. The ants occasionally nest in houses. Workers are almost omnivorous, feeding on the flesh of insects, birds, mammals, the sap or juices of plants and fruits, seeds, honeydew, and household foods such as meat, butter, cheese, peanut butter, nuts, breads, bacon, and grease. They seem to show a preference for foods of a high protein content. The ants are not only carnivorous but highly predaceous. Nests are often constructed on lawns, disfiguring them and interfering with mowing. Paved sidewalks and public roads are sometimes undermined by the nests of the ants. Workers are highly aggressive and sting viciously; people allergic to their stings can suffer great discomfort or even death. The ants steal seeds from seedbeds and feed on the germinating seed of corn, causing a high percentage of loss. Workers are known to gnaw holes in fabrics, especially if soiled. They tend or may foster honeydew-excreting insects such as plant lice, mealybugs, and scales. They are known to kill young rabbits, pigs, and other mammals, and quail and other birds are especially vulnerable to the ants at hatching time. The ants are often so abundant in gardens and fields that the gathering of vegetables and other crops is almost impossible. The ants gnaw into the roots, stems, buds, and fruit of plants such as cabbages, collards, okra, eggplant, and field peas. Young plants are seriously damaged by girdling or the removal of outer bark from roots or stems; young citrus stock is especially subject to this kind of attack.

References: Creighton, 1930, pp. 88-89; Lyle and Fortune, 1948, pp. 833-834; Green, 1952, pp. 592-597; Anonymous, 1954, pp. 1-8, fig.; Jung and Derbes, 1957, pp. 372-373; Caro, Derbes, and Jung, 1957, pp. 475-488, figs.; Anonymous, 1958, pp. 1-21, figs.; Favorite, 1958, pp. 445-448; Blum, Roberts, and Novak, 1961, pp. 73-74.

Solenopsis molesta (Say)

Thief ant. A native species, which ranges through the eastern and central United States from southern Canada to the Gulf Coast. It is one of the smallest species discussed in this paper. The name "thief ant" refers to the habit of nesting in or very near the nests of other ants, which they rob of food and brood. At times this species has been confused with the Pharaoh ant; the two species, however, differ in many characters, some of which are easily recognizable.

Taxonomic Characters

Subfamily and generic characters: Same as for *wyloni* with the following exceptions: Workers monomorphic. Eye minute, with 4-6 ommatidia or less. *Specific characters:* Workers extremely small, 1.3-1.8 mm. long. Scape extending more than half the distance between eye and posterior border of head. Antennal club unusually large and elongate, approximately one and one-third times the combined lengths