



Figure 23.—*Solenopsis molesta* (Say), thief ant, lateral view of worker.

of remainder of funiculus. Anterior border of clypeus with two distinct teeth, the lateral tooth absent or obsolescent. Mandible normally with four teeth. Dorsal surface of head with sparse, scattered piligerous punctures which are apparently absent from a median area extending from clypeus to posterior border of head; punctures distinct in some kinds of lighting and indistinct in others. Postpetiolar node (viewed from above) wider than long, widest near the middle of its length. Body hairs moderately abundant and well distributed, suberect to erect, rather long. Body largely smooth and shiny. Body color ranging from yellowish or light brown to dark brown.

Biology and Economic Importance

S. molesta is one of our well-known and common species of house-infesting ants. Colonies contain many hundreds to a few thousand individuals. The ants nest in exposed soil or under cover of stones and other objects, in rotting wood, and in the woodwork and masonry of houses. Van Pelt has found colonies of this ant common in the Blue Ridge Mountains at altitudes of 3,500 to 5,500 feet. Nuptial flights have been observed from late July to early fall; the sexed forms copulate in flight. A single fertile female is capable of establishing her nest alone but she may not always do so; one observer noted a nuptial flight in which some females carried at least one worker each attached to her body. Workers are almost omnivorous. They feed on both dead and live insects and are especially noted for being predaceous. They are also highly granivorous and feed on planted or germinating corn, milo, sorghum, feterita, and kafir, often causing considerable damage to these crops. Workers are fond of honeydew and are known to tend plant lice, mealybugs, and scale insects. They feed on many household foods such as meats, breads, sweets, ripened fruits, animal fats, vegetable oils, nuts, and dairy products. They appear to prefer foods with a high protein content. In most instances the ants nest in houses, commonly in hot weather. In some homes they may give trouble periodically over a long period of years but in others they appear only infrequently. I once found the ants nesting in a rotten porch floor near a kitchen, which they were invading to feed on crackers