

THE FIRE ANT

An imported species of this insect has become a serious pest in the South. It is studied both to find means to control it and to learn how a species adapts itself to a new environment

by Edward O. Wilson

“Fire ant” is the common name of many ant species distributed throughout the tropical and warm temperate regions of the New World. The sting of these ants causes a burning sensation, hence the name. Three species of fire ant are native to the

southern U. S.; a fourth (*Solenopsis saevissima*) was introduced from South America around 1918. For 10 years the imported fire ant lived within the city limits of Mobile, Ala.; then it began to spread. It has now become a dominant species over a large part of the South,

and has developed into a serious pest.

It is not only a serious pest but a versatile one. In South America the normal diet of the fire ant appears to consist mostly of seeds, the flesh of insects and “honeydew” gathered from living insects such as aphids. But its dense



FIRE ANTS swarm out of a fire-ant mound which has been broken open. These ants are workers, which sting fiercely. The mound is

honeycombed with passages. It is built by the workers out of tightly packed particles of soil; thus it has considerable strength.