

# Underground Kingdoms

by Jess Macedo



Did you know that beneath the grass on which you walk, there is a whole community hard at work? Ants are social insects that work together in order to survive.

Imagine that you are the queen ant in an ant colony. Unlike human queens, you are not royalty, wearing a gold crown. But like human queens, you ARE the head of your kingdom, or colony, and you are the only one who can reproduce, or have babies. You will live about 5-30 years.

Like any good queen, you have soldiers. Soldier ants have very large heads. They use their huge heads to block the entrance to your nest and fight any insect trying to enter. You also have scout ants who create a scent trail leading to the food they locate. This allows other ants to follow the scent to the food, and then help carry it back to the nest. Here, it is stored in the tunnels and chambers in the colony.

Worker ants use their jaws to dig the nest's tunnels and chambers. They keep the walls solid using their saliva. They carry the piles of dirt their digging creates outside.

Quite the kingdom! Each member has a job that allows the colony to survive. Not only should we say "all hail the queen," perhaps it should be "all hail the ant colony"!

## Ants: A Closer Look



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Ants may be small, but they are mighty creatures together. Let's take a closer look. At the center of it all is the queen ant. Not only is she the head of the colony, but she will spend her life laying eggs.

Out of her eggs come worker ants who dig the nest. They use their powerful jaws to dig out these chambers and tunnels. They then carry the dirt piles outside to form anthills we see.

She also lays eggs that will become soldier ants. They have huge heads. They literally “use their heads” to block the entrance to the nest so enemies cannot get to the queen or her eggs. They also will fight any insect that tries to come into the nest. Beware entering their home if you are not an ant!

Scout ants travel outside to find food, and then return leaving a scent trail. Worker ants then follow this trail and help carry the food back, storing it in the chambers.

All of these ants have different, but equally important, jobs. Working together, they are able to keep the colony alive and thriving. Now that is teamwork!

**Prompt: Ants are busy insects. Describe the different jobs that ants in the colony do. Use details from the passage to support your answer.**