

Junior Ranger Nature Notes



PERFECT MATCH: TERMITE STYLE

Termite mounds are a distinctive feature of the Territory landscape. Their walls of hardened clay surround a vast honeycomb of rooms where the humidity and temperature are kept constant. The huge queen termite lives in a central room with her smaller king. Serving her is an organised labour force of energetic workers and a well drilled army of brave soldiers.

The majority of termites which hatch from eggs are the pale **workers**. They are males and females whose sexual organs never develop. They are blind, soft, vulnerable and don't like the light. Although blind, they have antennae which are very sensitive to vibration and smell. They are especially active at night: gathering food and feeding the colony via a vast network of tunnels which fan out underground from the mound; cleaning internal chambers and removing garbage; taking eggs from the queen's chamber to the nursery; and feeding the developing **nymphs**.



The **soldiers** only defend the colony. They have armoured bodies and take up battle positions wherever the nest has been attacked or is being repaired. Different species have different weapons. They have pincer nippers, injection needles and are big on chemical warfare. Some have such gruesome bulky weapons that they're unable to feed themselves.



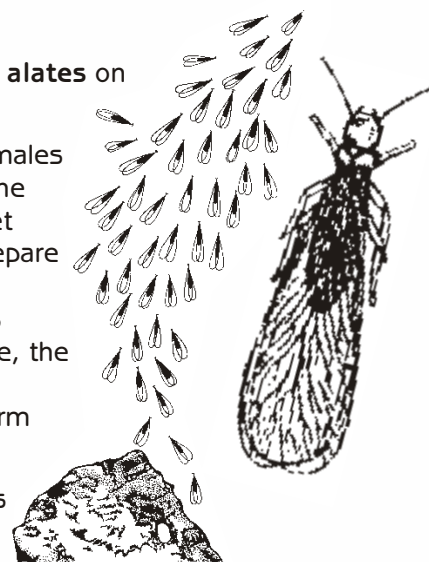
The wetter months of the year from November to March are a time of feverish activity aimed at establishing new termite colonies. On damp evenings swarms of flying ants periodically fill the air and find their way into people's houses. These are not ants at all, but

special flying termites called **alates** on th-eir marriage flight.

The alates are males and females capable of reproduction. In the months leading up to the wet season they develop and prepare to leave the mound. At the designated time the workers unplug tunnels to the surface, the soldiers stand by to repel intruders and the alates swarm out.

The marriage flight rarely has a happy ending, as most of the prospective brides and bridegrooms are eaten by birds, lizards, echidnas or ants.

Following swarming, those alates that survive shed their wings and each pair seeks out a suitable place to establish a new colony. The king doesn't really change in shape, but the queen's abdomen may become hugely swollen with eggs. In fact she is little more than a large, non-moving egg laying machine. Some subterranean termite queens are capable of producing 2000 eggs per day. Mature termite colonies may number up to two million individuals and may exist for as long as 50 years.



Northern
Territory
Government



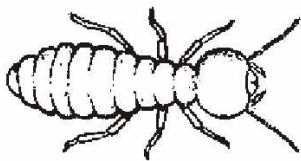
DON'T CALL ME A WHITE ANT!

Termites are sometimes called white ants. Indeed they do like to live together in one big happy social family like ants, wasps and bees do. However, they are actually more closely related to cockroaches than ants. They belong to a group of insects (Order) that scientists call *Isoptera*, whereas Ants belong to a group called *Hymenoptera*.

Use the following code to unravel the differences between termites and ants.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z Code : A = Z B = Y
Z Y X W V U T S R Q P O N M L K J I H G F E D C B A C = X D = W etc

TERMITES



Workers

They are sexually sterile males and females.

They have straight antennae.

H L U G

They have bodies and dehydrate easily.

D Z R H G

They have no .

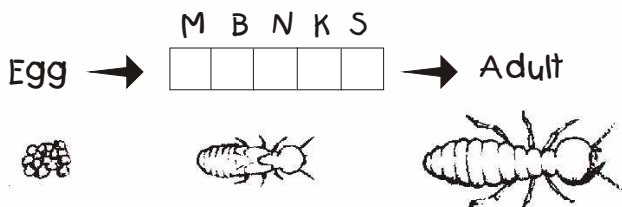
Soldiers

Termite colonies have a special caste called soldiers to defend against enemies.

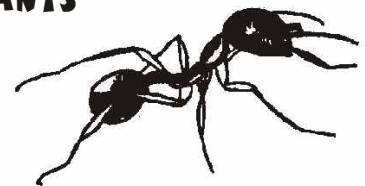
Life Cycle

The king and queen live together and mate many times.

There is no pupa stage in their life cycle.



ANTS



Workers

They are sexually sterile females.

They have antennae.

Y V M G

They have a and .

S Z I W

H P R M

They have a waist between their

and

G S L I Z C

Z Y W L N V M

Soldiers

Ant colonies have no soldiers.

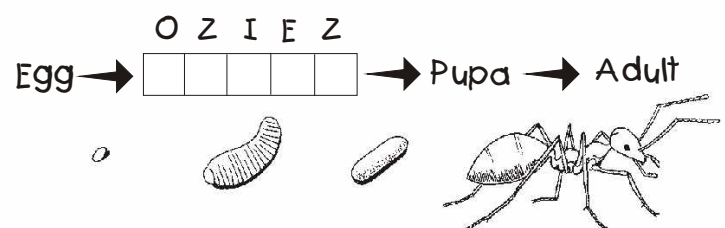
The defend the nest if it is attacked.

D L I P V I H

Life Cycle

The king mates once with the queen then he dies.

The life cycle includes a pupa stage.



Want to learn more about termites?

Check out the book *Termites of the Top End* by Alan Andersen and Peter Jacklyn. It has great colour photos of many of the different mounds scattered across the Top End and loads of other cool information.