

Nature Notes

Junior Ranger

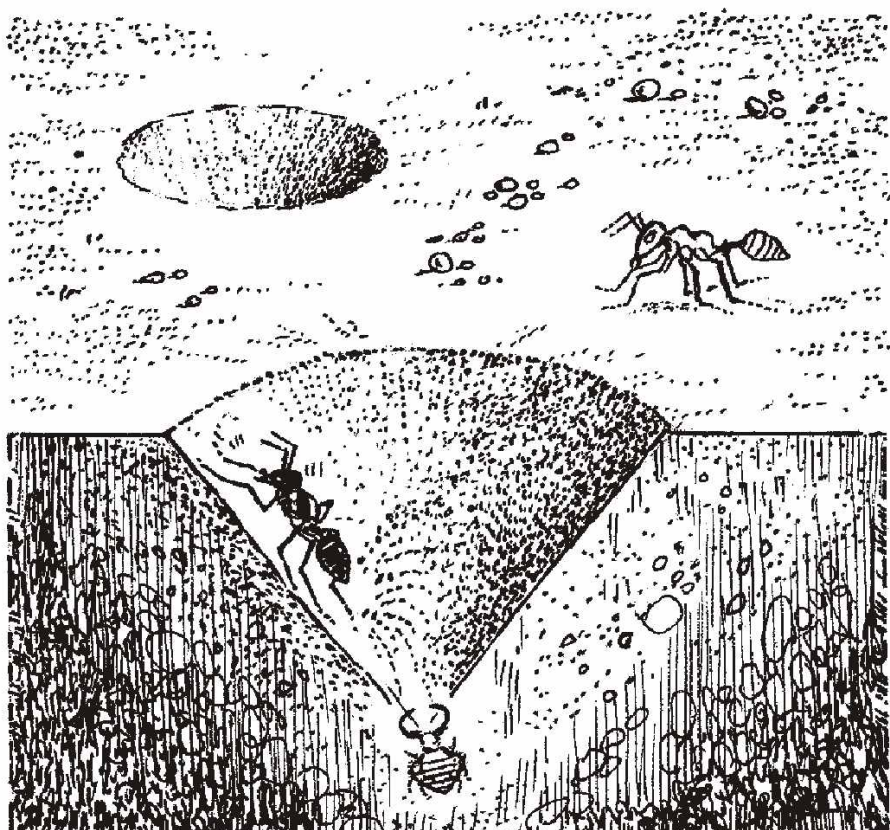
ANT-LIONS

Cone-shaped pits are commonly seen in sandy soil throughout the Northern Territory. These are traps made by an unusual predator called the ant-lion.

The ant-lion builds its pit by burrowing backwards into the sand, turning in circles and flicking out sand with its head. The head is flat like a garden spade.

The ant-lion hides at the bottom and waits for an unlucky victim to tumble in. The pit's steep sides make escape very difficult. The ant-lion grabs its victim with its enormous jaws and sucks out its blood. They are tough little creatures and can last a long time without a feed.

They don't need to drink either because they get all their water from the food they eat. They conserve water in their bodies by moving around and building pits at night. Being hidden under the sand in the day is a good way to escape the harsh sunlight from drying their bodies out.



Ant-lions sometimes leave their pits and travel overland or just under the surface. They pull themselves along backwards. Look for their trails or the ridges they push up as they travel under the sand.

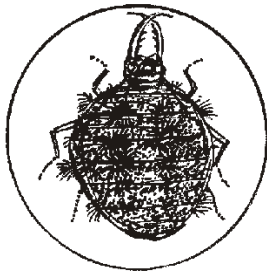
Try blowing gently into the bottom of a pit with a plastic drinking straw. You may be able to uncover the ant-lion's big jaws.



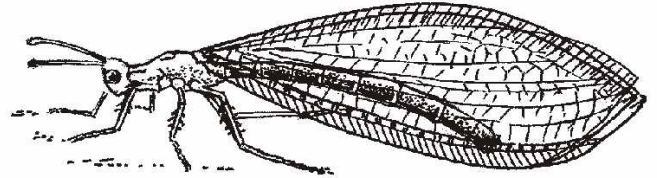
Northern
Territory
Government



Ant-lions are the nymph stage of a brown insect called a lacewing. The adult gets its name from its large wings that look like they're made of lace.



Nymph



Adult

The female lacewing lays her eggs in the sand where they hatch into ant-lions.

APHIS-LIONS

The ant-lion has a relative which grows into a small, green lacewing. However, the nymphs of this insect do not make sand pits. They are called aphis-lions because they prey on aphids living on trees and shrubs. They also attack scale insects and lerp insects.

Another item of aphis-lion tucker is hidden in the puzzle below.

Only one letter is shared by all four words on each line. Work out which letter and write it in the box.

- | | | | | | |
|-----|--------|---------|--------|--------|----------------------|
| 1. | trick | kite | milk | action | <input type="text"/> |
| 2. | pan | action | dingo | wing | <input type="text"/> |
| 3. | small | hose | side | wasp | <input type="text"/> |
| 4. | yellow | blew | bell | knee | <input type="text"/> |
| 5. | each | catfish | falcon | buck | <input type="text"/> |
| 6. | train | eat | hunt | thin | <input type="text"/> |
| 7. | dove | edible | tucker | geese | <input type="text"/> |
| 8. | Height | geese | snag | dough | <input type="text"/> |
| 9. | dog | huge | sing | lung | <input type="text"/> |
| 10. | Small | hose | side | wasp | <input type="text"/> |

Want to learn more about ant-lions?

Check out the book *Australian Insects - A Natural History* by Bert Brunet.

