

The ultimate display of ant altruism is found in Malaysia. Here resides a rare breed of carpenter ant that has been given a rather gruesome name—the Malaysian exploding ant (*Camponotus saundersi*). This tiny creature can actually explode itself outside the nest to protect the colony from enemies. These “kamikaze” ants have large poison glands that run the whole length of their body. When the nest is threatened, soldier ants violently contract their abdominal muscles—thus rupturing their skin (exoskeleton)—and spray a sticky, corrosive poison in all directions. We might see this ant as a “type of Christ”—one willing to “go outside the camp” (Hebrews 13:8) to give up their life so that others might live (Mark 10:45).

DIGGING DEEPER

- The Bible (Proverbs 6:6 ESV) refers to an ant as “her” or “she.” That’s because ant

colonies are made up almost entirely of females. Theirs is a society of “sisters.”

- Compared to you, an ant’s strength is small (Proverbs 30:25), but some ants can lift 100 times their own weight. That’s like a 120-pound (54 kg) woman lifting six tons!
- Ants are the greatest predators on Earth. They eat more meat than all lions, tigers, bears, and wolves combined.

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HIS Nature

“Go to the ant . . . consider her ways, and be wise”
PROVERBS 6:6

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THE ALTRUISTIC ANT

Believe it or not, the tiny ant is one of the most altruistic creatures fashioned by Christ Jesus. As an ant ages, she willingly changes jobs in order to best serve her colony. Older ants volunteer to perform some of the riskier chores—such as colony defense, foraging outside the safety of the nest, and removal of germ-laden trash. In addition, diseased and dying ants voluntarily leave the nest to prevent exposing their sisters to danger. Would we do the same if we were in an ant’s “shoes”?



Ant defending her helpless sister

Altruism (ALL - tru - izm) comes from the French word, *altruisme*, which means “other.” It describes those who are more devoted to the *welfare of others* than themselves (see Philippians 2:3-4). Whether or not ants are aware of the self-sacrificing behaviors that Christ liberally gives them, only He knows. Obviously it is important to God, which speaks volumes about His character!

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Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.

HEBREWS 13:13

King Jesus designed ants with two stomachs—a “social” stomach and a “private” stomach. The purpose of the social stomach is to store liquid food, which can later be shared with her sisters. Ants frequently pass food from one to another—scientists call it *trophallaxis* (trof - IL - lak - sus). Food sharing helps bind ants together as one colony. It’s like the special dinners and picnics people host to encourage family bonding—except that people don’t pass food mouth to mouth! Trophallaxis might also be seen as a dim reflection of the wedding feast of the Lamb in Heaven—Revelation 19:9—when the glory of Christ will be shared with all His people.

Honey pot ants



There’s another type of ant that takes communal feeding a step further. Honey pot ants, as they are called, volunteer as living storage tanks of honeydew, so that the colony can survive in colder months. A small percentage of worker ants volunteer to go underground and cling like bats to the ceiling of a special chamber. During the summer and fall, sister ants regularly feed the “honeypots” fresh supplies of honeydew harvested from aphids and mealybugs.

The honeypot ants are able to consume an enormous amount of honeydew. God provided them super-thin abdominal skin, which stretches as their bellies swell with honeydew. When bloated, they are unable to move, making them fully dependent upon their sisters for survival.

Throughout the colder months when honeydew isn’t



available outside the nest, the honeypots feed the colony. They bring up honeydew from their bulging bellies and provide sweet food for their hungry sisters. So for part of the year, the ant clan relies on the honeypots. During the other half of the year, the tables are turned.

By spring, their deflated bellies look like raisins. But once a honeypot, always a honeypot—they’re very dedicated. These ants never return to normal life nor see the light of day. They do, however, spend several years in faithful service to their community.

Another example of altruism can be observed in weaver ants (*Oecophylla* sp.) of Southeast Asia. These insects build homes by sewing together leaves. Baby ants (larvae) are taken from their nest, held in the mandibles of worker ants,



Weaver ants pulling together

and moved back and forth over the seam of the leaves. As they do this, the babies freely release threads of silk, which “stitch” the two leaf edges together.

The downside to this type of nest building is that if a baby ant sacrifices herself for the good of the colony, she then doesn’t have enough silk to spin her own cocoon, and thus mature into an adult. She remains a larva all her life. But Jesus, our Creator, secretly directs the adult weaver ants to care for these babies the rest of their lives. *What a good God they serve* (Psalm 145:9)!

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