

ANT WAYS

ANTS AND THEIR "COWS"

This month you will read about the food of ants and how they get them. At home you must have often noticed that "where the sugar is, there is the ant." This is because all ants like sweet things, especially sweet liquids. Their main food is in the form of nectar and honeydew. Ants get their honeydew from smaller insects called aphids that punch holes in plants with their beaks and drink plant juice. This juice helps the aphids grow and some of it is passed through their bodies in clear, colorless sweet drops which fall on leaves and on the ground. People call them honeydew.

An ant will run up to an aphid and stroke its body with its feelers; the aphid lets out a drop gently from the tip of its body. The ant licks it up greedily. Aphids are then like "cows" to ants, the ants milk them for their honeydew. Ants sometimes build little sheds or colonies of aphids on the stem of a plant. Sometimes ants carry their little "cows" in their mouths to fresh plants where there is more juice for them. There are other ants which gather the eggs of aphids from leaf-stalks of plants in October, take them into the nest and watch over them during the cold season until they are hatched in March. Then they place the young ones in the shoots of certain plants. And so they are sure of food during the following summer. Is not the ant a creature of great foresight and prudence?

The ants maintain other insects in their nests that help them in other ways. They have the small wood-louse that feeds on refuse in the

nest and so act as their janitor. A very welcome guest in their nest is a tiny, blind beetle with little tufts of hairs grouped on its back. Their hairs secrete a substance that the ants like very much and so they lick these hairs with great enjoyment. So the ants feed the beetle from their own mouths and in every way encourage it to remain with them. The ant must be a very thoughtful insect, is it not?

STUDY TEST ON "ANT WAYS"

1. Choose the best answer:

a. What do all ants like to eat? (aphids, beetles, sweet liquids, rice).

b. How does the ant make the aphids secrete honeydew? (by feeding it, by stroking its body, by hatching its eggs, by devouring it).

c. Where does the aphid get the honeydew? (from plants, grasses, the ground, the ant).

d. What are "ants' cows"? (wood-louse, beetle, bees, aphids).

e. Which is the ants' janitor? (The aphid, the queen ant, the wood-louse, the beetle).

f. What does the ant get from the hairs on beetle's back? (honey dew, nectar, a substance they secrete, eggs of aphids).

2. Give three adjectives which properly describe the ant. Prove your answers.

3. How does the ant encourage the blind beetle to stay in their nest?

