

Insect Fact Sheet

The Wood Ant

Wood Ants are our largest ants, with some workers measuring 1cm long. Some colonies can contain well over 100,000 workers and have several queens. Wood ants are known for constructing huge nests in Pine woods.



The nests are constructed both above and below ground. A huge dome of pine needles, twigs and other woodland debris, is built up to a metre high in very old nests, with a series of underground chambers and brood cells. Brood chambers are built within the dome structure and the temperature is maintained at a constant level throughout the day, by the workers opening and closing the numerous nest entrances. The whole nest is a major structural achievement from such a small insect. Yet the Wood Ant is much larger than the red ants commonly seen in gardens.

The queens lay all the eggs in the colony and is the mother of all the workers. Many ant colonies often have just one queen, but the Wood Ant will usually have more and colonies need to collect a lot of food to survive. Foraging ants will bring thousands of insects back to the nest and are very useful to foresters, in helping to keep down the numbers of harmful pests.



Egg

Wood Ants will also fiercely protect their nest from predators, so if you find a nest, do not get too close, as they can spray formic acid. This only hurts if it gets in the eyes, or an existing cut and smells of vinegar!

Larva



So admire Wood Ants from a distance and marvel at their ability to create their own 'cities' in the woods.

Wood Ant cities have their own network of paths leading to suitable foraging areas.

These are the same as our own roads to the shops and will be full of ants going to and from the nest, some carrying food and others carrying nest material.

Pupa

