



Phone 863.465.2571  
123 MAIN DRIVE ★ VENUS, FLORIDA 33960

To: Highlands News-Sun

From: Archbold Biological Station

Date Published: January 6, 2017

### **The mysterious world of ants**

Florida is full of ants, ranging from burly carpenter ants parading up tree trunks to microscopic species tunneling deep in the sand. From Archbold Biological Station comes the first book on Florida ants, covering all 239 species found in the state. The author, Dr. Mark Deyrup, scientist at Archbold, has spent more than 25 years studying the strange lives of Florida ants, including about 130 species found here in Highlands County.

“Even the most familiar ants do amazing things,” says Deyrup. “For example, several queen fire ants often cooperate to start a new colony, but as the colony grows the queens begin to kill each other off until only one remains. It is a kind of ‘Game of Thrones’ taking place right in your lawn.” Other common ants grow special fungus gardens in little caves underground, carefully cultivating and weeding the mushroom crops. Great colonies of army ants move through underground trails, attacking the colonies of other ants.”

“More than 50 species of ants have been accidentally imported into Florida from far away, many species probably arriving in wooden sailing ships. “The dark and smelly holds of ships would have been ideal for some ants,” claims Deyrup, “Columbus undoubtedly brought European ants as stowaways. Every kind of ant has a story.”

Different kinds of ants can be difficult to identify, so the new Florida ant book includes drawings of the species with directions on how to tell them apart. Each drawing took about a day to complete. “For such tiny animals, ants have an amazing amount of detail,” says Deyrup. “Many species have peculiar spoon-shaped or lollipop-shaped hairs, while others are ornamented with neat parallel ridges, or are covered with patterns of tiny pits. These are cool to look at, and useful for identification, but often we have no idea of how these features are useful to the ants.

Sometimes I just look through the illustrations, wondering how long it will be before scientists solve the mysteries of ant structure.”

The book is 425 pages long, with 90 plates of drawings of ants. It is intended primarily for entomologists (people who study insects) and for naturalists who have access to a microscope. The introduction to the book states, “This book is for those Floridians who live in proximity to a diversity of interesting ant species. Actually, that is all of us. This book is an invitation to detach from personal servomechanisms, flip open the airlock, extend the landing ramp, and take a pioneering step into the exciting Planet of the Ants. It is a world that is amazing, intricate, beautiful, savage, and almost unexplored.”

Deyrup, M. 2016 *Ants of Florida: Identification and Natural History*. CRC Press. This book is sold on Amazon.

**Umphrey’s Long-Legged Ant. Drawing by Dr. Mark Deyrup.**

