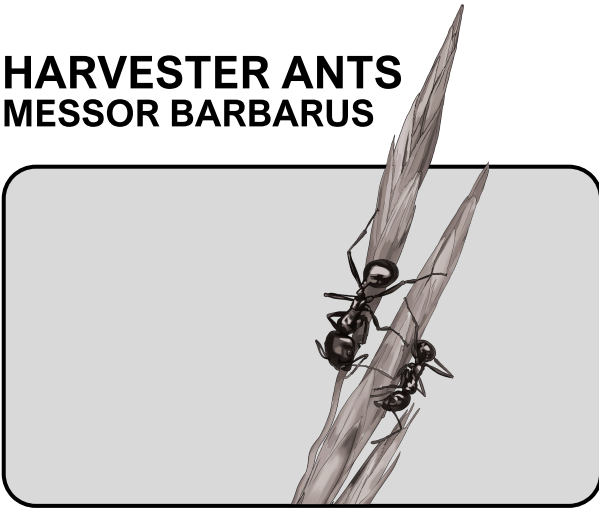


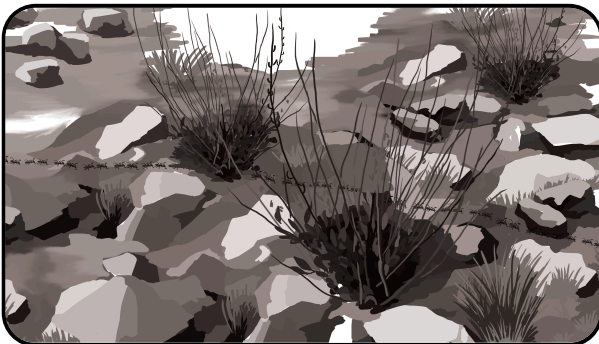
HARVESTER ANTS MESSOR BARBARUS



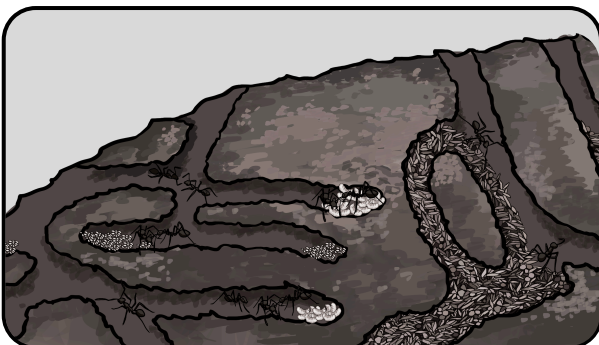
Messor barbarus collects a variety of grains and seeds, including grass and cereal seeds in particular, as well as seeds from wild herbs and other plants from their Mediterranean habitat. When selecting grains, they pay attention to size, weight and nutrient content. Ideal grains are easy to transport, not too large or too heavy, and contain plenty of starch and protein. The workers inspect the seeds intensively with their antennae and mandibles to check quality and freshness. They also avoid seeds that are damp or already infested with mold.



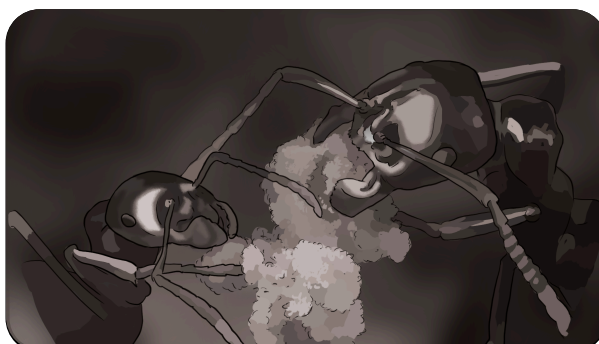
The workers pick up the seeds with their strong mandibles and carry them individually into the nest. In doing so, they often create highly visible, well-organized ant trails. Individual ants can transport grains that weigh multiple times their own body weight and the collection routes often extend up to 20-30 meters, in some cases even over 50 meters. A large colony of Messor barbarus can collect several thousand grains a day, which can result in stocks of several kilograms within a year.



The piles of grains or “depots” along the ant trails of Messor barbarus mainly serve as temporary storage or collection points. These temporary storage sites are created when workers initially deposit grains to make the transportation route more efficient or to make it easier to overcome obstacles. Other workers take over the grains deposited there and then bring them back to the nest. In this way, the ants optimize their collection process and increase the efficiency of grain transport, especially over longer distances.



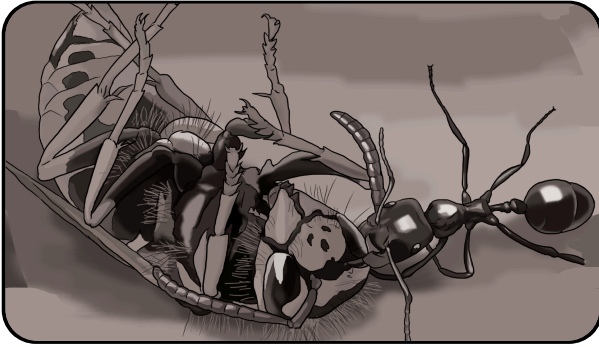
The nest of harvester ants (Messor barbarus) is a complex underground structure that is optimally adapted to their lifestyle. It consists of numerous chambers connected by a network of passages and tunnels. The large storage chambers, in which the ants store their collected seeds and grains in a dry, dark and cool place to protect them from moisture and mold, are particularly characteristic. There are also brood chambers for eggs and larvae as well as deeper, specially protected chambers where the queen lives. At the entrance to the nest, conspicuous areas are cleared by the ants, where waste or unusable grain remains often accumulate.



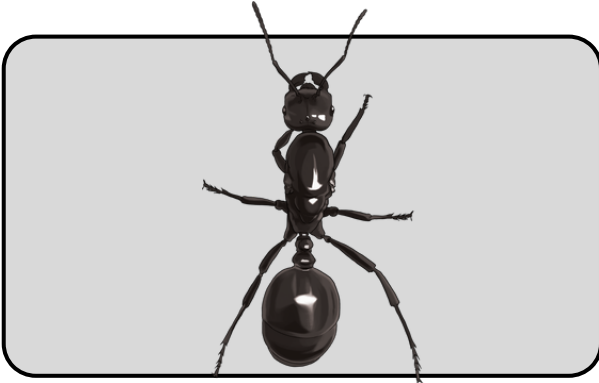
Messor barbarus produces so-called “ant bread” from stored grains and seeds. The workers carefully crush and chew the seeds, mixing them with saliva. This produces a dough-like, easily digestible substrate known as “ant bread”. This processing makes the seeds easier to digest and easier to store, and also prevents mold growth. The ant bread thus provides a long-term and secure food reserve for the entire colony, especially during dry periods.

HARVESTER ANTS

MESSOR BARBARUS



Messor barbarus does not actively hunt in the classic sense. It is mainly a herbivorous species and feeds almost exclusively on seeds and grains. Occasionally, however, the ants also collect dead insects or other protein-rich food as carrion. They do not actively hunt living insects, but take advantage of opportunities that arise spontaneously. Their mandibles are specially adapted for cutting and carrying seeds, but not for actively hunting or killing prey.



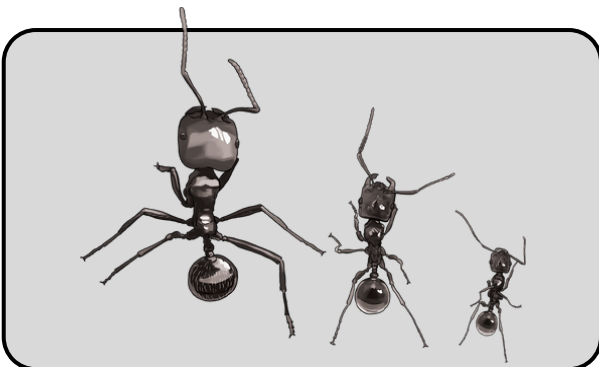
Queen:

- Size: approx. 14-18 mm
- Color: dark brown to black, shiny, strong build



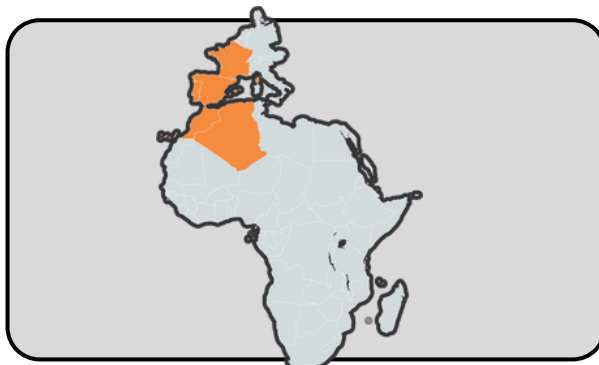
Male:

- Size: about 8-12 mm
- Color: black or dark brown, with wings, slender build



Workers:

- Small workers: 3-6 mm
- Medium workers: 6-9 mm
- Large workers (soldiers): 9-12 mm
- Color: varying from reddish brown to dark brown or black, often with shiny body



Distribution:

- Predominantly Mediterranean region (Mediterranean climate)
- Southern Europe: Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, Balkan region
- North Africa: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia
- Prefers dry, open landscapes (steppes, semi-deserts, fields)
- Sandy or stony soils with good drainage preferred