

Food supply and ants behaviour (Hym., Formicidae)

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Zusammenfassung: Ein Ameisenstaat hat offenbar die Möglichkeit, Hungerzeiten durch Verspeisen von eigenen Eiern und Junglarven zu überstehen. Diese zufällige Beobachtung bei mehreren Ameisenarten in Kunstnestern ist wohl als Anpassung an wechselnde Nahrungsmengen zu bewerten und offensichtlich im normalen Verhalten der Tiere verankert. Im Sinn einer Kosten-Nutzen-Rechnung erscheint diese Lösung durchaus ökonomisch.

When I first started to keep ants I noticed an interesting piece of behaviour that was probably a response to my inexperienced feeding methods.

The difficulty of giving captive ants a balanced diet is shown by the fact that few nests produce winged females or males. Although abundant eggs and larvae are produced in times of plenty some are eaten during leaner times. The number of adult ants increases at a constant rate in spite of this cannibalism. If this is part of the ants normal behaviour it is an excellent adaptation to fluctuating or seasonal food supplies (and my inexperienced catering).

I have seen this behaviour in *Formica fusca*, *Lasius niger* and *L. flavus*.

Interestingly it is the eggs and youngest larvae that are eaten first, possibly because they represent the least investment in term of raw material or because they are quicker to replace. Whatever the reason I have never read about this aspect of behaviour. It is the ultimate in recycling!

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