

Ants: The world's most successful species?

Given their centrality to life on the planet, not to mention their teeming populations, shouldn't we think more highly of ants? They are among the most sophisticated and successful life-forms ever to crawl the earth.

Follow the latest news and policy debates on sustainable agriculture, biomedicine, and other 'disruptive' innovations. Subscribe to our newsletter.

[SIGN UP](#)

Humans are, of course, smarter and bigger than ants, and in the past 300,000 years or so of our species' reign, we have conquered the planet and commandeered its resources to a degree perhaps unmatched in the history of life. But compared with those of ants and other social insects — bees, termites and some wasps — our record is a hilarious blip.

Ants have been around for [140 million years](#). They are a dominant feature — often some of the primary [ecosystem engineers](#) — of nearly every land-based ecosystem on Earth. And they are the true inventors of what we think of as several quintessentially human endeavors.

Ants have been farming for [at least 60 million years](#). Leafcutter ants, for instance, forage for vegetation, which they use to grow crops of a fungus that they have domesticated for their exclusive use. Other ants [maintain herds of aphids](#) that feed on the sap of plants; the ants then “milk” the aphids of their sugar-rich secretions. Ants are also [master architects](#), [formidable warriors](#) that can also [maintain peace through strength](#) and even engage in compromise and a [kind of democracy](#).

[**This is an excerpt. Read the full article here**](#)