

BOOK REVIEW

TABER S.W.: FIRE ANTS. Texas A&M University Press, 2000, 308 pp., hard cover, ISBN 0-89096-945-0. Price 29.95 USD.

In the southern parts of the United States of America there is a problem - the fire ants. They do not cause "fires", but sting (it is not bite!) which because it provokes in humans a painful burning sensations, earned these insects their common name. Two species are involved - the first, "black imported ant" (*Solenopsis invicta*, the species name of which means "invincible") arrived in the USA in 1915, the second, "red imported ant" (*Solenopsis richteri*) between 1933 and 1945. Both came from South America probably by ship, and each species may have arrived on more than one occasion. The second species is the more important. Its fiery aggression, voracious feeding, and prolific nest building combined to make this species a pest of many field crops, e.g., cotton, potatoes, cucumbers, tomatoes, cabbage etc., and also orchards and pastures. They are omnivorous, eating both animal and vegetable, and catching not only various insects and other invertebrates, but also vertebrates such as young rabbits, rats, and mice. (It is said that they can kill calves

and piglets!) Being stung hundred of sensitive people die every year in an anaphyletic shock.

There is an immense literature about these ants and Stephen Taber, who teaches at St. Edward's University, Austin (Texas), is the first to put all this information together in one book. And he has succeeded! In 14 chapters he discusses all six species of ants from the genus *Solenopsis*, not just the two introduced species, the origin and evolution of fire ants, their symbionts, medical importance, chemical control, and the pros and cons of their enemies in the context of biocontrol. (The fire ants are not only nuisance, but also beneficial as they kill other banes, including larvae of horn and stable flies and lone star ticks!). The book has three appendixes - fire ants of the world, how to identify U.S. fire ants and how to preserve fire ants for study, and concludes with a glossary, detailed bibliography and index. It is a very good book. People interested in fire ants will appreciate this book very much.

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