

ARMY ANTS AMBIGUITY

Francis Baumli, Ph.D.
4 Ranch Lane
Saint Louis, Missouri
63131
Phone: (314) 966-2167

ngsforum@nationalgeographic.com
(email query)

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Dear people,

In his article, "Army Ants: Inside the Ranks" (National Geographic, August 2006) Mark Moffett states that, "Their dragnets don't take down livestock or people (though some African species occasionally live up to that image)." (p. 141)

This sentence seems contradictory. Is Mister Moffett stating that army ants never overwhelm livestock or people, but certain situations give the appearance that they do? Or is he stating a general rule about army ants while admitting that there are occasional exceptions? Or is he stating that army ants never overwhelm livestock or people but certain species of ants in Africa, which are not true army ants, occasionally do? I, and other readers in this household, remain confused as to what he means.

Sincerely,

Francis Baumli, Ph.D.
(a subscriber for many
decades)

P.S. I hope you will answer this question, whether or not it appears in the "Letters" section. Thank you very much.

(Written: September 13, 2006.)

(Posted: August 20, 2013.)

(I publish this little piece because it poses a worthy question in response to errant prose. Unfortunately, such prose has too often been the stock fare of the National Geographic for the last two decades. Moreover, their editorial responsibility—and responsiveness—has also suffered. No reply to this letter was sent back, either from the author or from the editors.)