

ARMY ANTS AMBIGUITY

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(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 is rather confusing. 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? Or is he stating that some species of animals other than army ants 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 lax prose. Unfortunately, such prose has too often been the stock fare of the National Geographic over 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.)

WHEN PARENTS LOVE WHAT IS CUTE
(OR AS A PROFESSOR WOULD PUT IT):
FIXATION, OBSESSION, PERVERSION?
A SPECULATIVE NONPARAMETRIC STATICAL ANALYSIS
OF NASCENT PROTOPARADIGMATIC PRAXIOLOGICAL
ARCHETYPES:
A DISQUISITION IN LIEU OF A DISSERTATION

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DEFINE “ARCHGRAMMACIAN”

(or)

DO FIVE-DOLLAR WORDS DEFY, STYMY, OR INSPIRE ME?

(per “Page 85 sucks!”)

A POSTMORTEM ON ONE PAGE IN

THE PROFESSOR AND THE MADMAN:

A TALE OF MURDER, INSANITY, AND THE MAKING OF THE

OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY

Written by Francis Baumli, Ph.D.