

## LASIUS NIGER (3) COLONY JOURNAL

### 9 September 2007

I brought this colony from Antstore after believing my other *Lasius niger* colony had died out after I saw what look suspiciously like a segment of *Lasius niger* queen abdomen on the surface of the soil. I removed the soil where I believed them to have nested, but there was no sign of any ants. However, before they arrived I noticed, when looking at my *Temnothorax nylanderi*, housed in the same tank, that a small *Lasius niger* worker was in the tank, feeding from a fly. Interesting! I wonder where it came from, and, if there is still a colony in the tank.

So I have placed this new colony in a spare Antstore Starter Kit I had. They seemed to have settled in nicely and have tunnelled into the sand of the nesting box.

### 6 October 2007

Oddly enough this colony has not dug into the sand and created a 'normal' subterranean nest, but have decided, at least for the moment, to live on the surface of the sand. Interestingly though, the workers have built a 360 degree wall of sand around the queen, who seems quite at home in the sunlight. When I looked in on them yesterday, I noticed that a pile of brood of all stages has been placed in the corner of the tank, again on the surface. The position that this particular colony's tank is situated may have something to do with this. Their tank is onto top of an old cabinet inside my ant shed and is almost touching the roof of the shed. My garden is south facing and so receives a lot of sunlight, which causes the roof of the shed to become very warm, and obviously this heat radiates down onto the ant tank. I guess as the winter settles in they may well dig in, in preparation for hibernation. They have not yet, as far as I am aware foraged in the foraging tank yet.

### 22 October 2007

These ants are still living on the surface despite the fact that the ambient temperature has dropped to as low as 4 or 5 degrees now, causing the ants on the surface to become inactive. I guess they plan to hibernate on top of the sand this year. I can just see the top of the queen's thorax over the edge of the wall of sand built around her by the workers.

### 9 March 2008

Still on the surface! There is a batch off eggs with the workers and queen which appear to have remained in a state of stasis, in that they have not developed into the larval stage, despite being present for a couple of months. It is not uncommon for this to happen to brood during the winter months. The ants have, it would appear, built an extension to the wall mentioned in the 6 Oct 07 journal entry. When I remove the lid to this ant farm, the ants react,

though very sluggishly. They have not ventured into the feeding box yet, or at least as far as I am aware, and I believe that they have not eaten so far.

### **15 April 2008**

I have moved this ant farm into my bedroom and it is now on my bedside cabinet. I'm not sure why I really did this other than I just fancied having an ant farm in my room. Well, if Austin can have one in his room, why can't I 😊

I placed a piece of cricket into the nesting part of the set up, rather than the foraging box, as they do not seem to have wandered that far yet. By putting the food directly into the nesting box, it should encourage the ants to feed sooner rather than later.

They are still living on the surface but the workers (of which there are currently 8) have built the queen a little chamber; though it is more of a shelter than an underground shelter.

### **08 May 2008**

There has been some more excavation work going on within this colony, and the queen, brood and workers are well and truly hidden away now. I have not removed the black sides of the ant farm for a peek inside yet, but instead wish to wait a bit longer to allow them to fully establish themselves underground.

I have notice on the past 2 days a single worker running about on the 'table' on which this ant farm stands. The thing is, these first generation workers are so small that they are able to squeeze out of even the smallest gaps. This should stop as each successive generation is born as the ants such become larger in size. So far as I can see there has been no foraging within the foraging tank yet, which is a shame as that is where all the food is.

### **13 June 2008**

There were four workers out in the foraging tank the other day, feeding from a piece of cockroach. I took a peek inside the ant farm itself but could not see the ants, though there was a tiny 'window' into one chamber, but the chamber appeared to be empty. From the ever-increasing pile of sand on the surface, there is some obvious nest expansion occurring.

### **9 August 2008**

Today I fed these ants with a piece of freshly killed cockroach, and moments later there were about 10-12 ants all over it. I have noticed that these workers are slightly larger than earlier generations; a good sign. The funnel of sand that had been built up the side of the nesting box seems to have been taken down in size a little. I have not noticed any more escapees lately. I think these new generation workers are now too big to squeeze through the holes that their younger sisters were able to do.

### **15 September 2008**

There has been a marked decrease in activity in this colony of late, and so today I removed the covering of the ant farm to peek inside. On previous attempts to do this I was unable to see anything, however this time the ants have enlarged their one and only chamber so that it now spans the width of the ant farm, allowing me to see inside. There I saw about 20 workers and 1 plump queen all looking well and happy. An hour later they were eating from a freshly killed fly that I put into the feeding tank.

### **15 October 2008**

Today I gave my ants a new sort of "Ant Jelly" which I saw for sale on Edu-Sci ([www.edu-sci-com](http://www.edu-sci-com)); a UK based ant-related shop, which also sells ant colonies with queens. This is the first time I have used Edu-Sci and first impressions of the service were good: 2 days from ordering to receiving my goods. I do not know what they are like when it comes to sending live ants though. Anyway, the "Vitamin Jelly", as it is called, looks like the Ant Jelly I make, but I have to say that it smells much better. I gave my *Lasius niger* some and they seemed to love it. Though it states that it has vitamins in it (though gives no details of which vitamins), it does not say whether it contains protein, which is something that ants must have for good larvae development. Therefore if you use this vitamin jelly, I would recommend you supplement it with freshly killed insects when you can.

These ants have been fairly active recently, with some 6-8 workers seen foraging in the feeding tank. The queen looks fit and healthy.

### **24 October 2008**

Just a quick update for those interested in how my *Lasius niger* got on with the new Vitamin Jelly mentioned in the previous update. I am very pleased with it; it lasts so much longer than the recipe I have been using in that it does not go mouldy as quickly. The jelly (if the pack is unopened, is claimed by the manufacturers to last 1 year. Once opened it should be stored in the fridge where it is stated it will last a few days. So far it has lasted 2 weeks (opened) in the fridge and over 1 week in the ant tank without going mouldy. Recommended ☺

### **09 November 2008**

These ants have shown no signs of wanting to hibernate, but then again they are kept in my room, which is comfortably warm now that I have fixed the radiator in it (it was only getting hot at the very bottom of the radiator and therefore was not heating my room properly. So I opened the bleed valve and loads of air came hissing out, which was soon followed by water at which point I closed the bleed valve again. Now the whole radiator gets hot and my room is nice and warm.) I took a peek at these ants and was pleased to see perhaps 15-20 workers, a healthy queen, and a nice pile of what look like first or second instar larvae. :-)

### **23 January 2009**

These ants have gone into a semi-hibernation phase in which they occasionally do forage for food, but mostly stay within the nest, doing nothing but sitting around. There are still about 20 workers, one queen, and a small pile of brood which has not changed in development as yet. Ants in the UK who are kept indoors in the winter still tend to reduce their activities during the winter months, even if kept warm. I have given them some vitamin jelly, but it may be a while before they venture out to feed. I am not worried by their inactivity at all.

### **15 February 2009**

I have moved this ant colony from my room to my living room as I spend more time downstairs than I do upstairs and so obviously I will see more of them if I kept them next to my computer. They are fairly active though only one or two are out foraging at the moment. I have started to feed them on jam and the insect jelly to give them a bit of a boost. A friend of mine is going to give me some crickets to feed them with. Hopefully the queen will soon start to busy herself with lots of egg-laying :-)

### **8 March 2009**

The *Lasius niger*'s have been quite active this week with 8 workers eating a cricket as I write this update. I noticed that 2 of the workers have found a tiny gap between the lid of the foraging tank and the lip of the tank it rests on. They have managed to squeeze themselves out of it but fortunately did not wander too far and returned to the nest without finding any food. Hopefully the cricket I gave them will keep them from doing that again. I may have to get some fluron to paint on the inside of the lip of the tank; they cannot climb across fluron as they cannot grip onto it.

### **14 March 2009**

Much the same as the last update really. They have been foraging and eating a lot, but, as far as I am aware, have not been so naughty as to wander out of their tank anymore. I cannot see any signs of nest expansion at the moment, but that should happen once the queen starts her egg-laying cycles.

### **05 April 2009**

Of all the ant species I have kept, *Lasius niger* have to be the naughtiest ants I have ever owned, (they are even naughtier than Zach :-P). I have found several workers wandering around on the table top on which their tank sits, and not only that but I have found one or two wandering around inside the nearby Tetramorium tank. As the future generations of ants from this colony get bigger, they will be too big to squeeze out, but for now I have to put up with the tiny nantics doing what they want. Fortunately there have been no casualties to date as far as I can tell. They are eating everything I put into their tank.

**25 April 2009**

The *Lasius niger* workers seem to have stopped wandering out of their tank now, or at least certainly not as much as they have been doing. Hopefully they are learning that there is not much outside their little world. They have been expanding the nest, evident from the piles of sand next to the nest entrance in the nesting box. There also are some empty cocoon cases.

**13 June 2009**

Not much to report on these ants really; a few foraging, but have quietened down a lot.