

A Spider Eating Ant Larvae or Pupae

BY DR. F. X. WILLIAMS

(Presented at the meeting of September 5, 1929)

Woodlawn, Honolulu, Sunday morning, August 18, 1929.

Prenolepis bourbonica Forel, a common and very active black ant, was observed changing its domicile from a cement plant box of soil at one end of my lanai coping to a small pot containing a young *Pritchardia* palm as well as a *Sadleria* fern that had just pushed its single frond through the soil. The opening thus made by this emerging fern head had been chosen by the ants as a portion of their nest or place of refuge. There was quite a stream of ants plying between the cement box and the flower pot, and here and there in the column was an ant bearing a white larva or pupa of its own kind and again, when the procession became denser, males and queens, some few of the latter wingless, could be seen running along with the rest towards the flower pot.

A medium large attid (salticid) spider in black and pale brown livery stood near by, its legs raising the body well off the cement. Evidently interested in the stream of hurrying insects, nevertheless it maintained the alertness of its kind and permitted no ants to wander too near its person. It soon became evident that the spider was robbing the ants of their young for, perceiving from a distance of several inches a white burden that passed before it, it would quickly but carefully approach this morsel—providing not too many ants were about it—would sidle in position so as to face the ant carrying the larva or pupa, and hastily attempt to grasp the latter. Usually the spider, after one or two such trials, succeeded in pulling the burden loose from its carrier and then it would retire to enjoy the tidbit. Four such pilferings were thus observed; once, however, the spider failing in her attempt was considerably discomfited by the stubborn ant that refusing to let go the babe was dragged along with it until she gave the spider a dose of formic acid; the arachnid retired from her activities for some time and held the tip of one foreleg to her

mouth, evidently washing it. Several less disastrous failures were also witnessed. A robbed ant would rush about wildly for a time.

This ant gives way to the smaller and more numerous *Pheidole megacephala* (Fabr.), and I have seen it with its young and queens clinging to the tips of a small bush while the invading *Pheidole* had not yet reached this refuge.

The warm, moist evenings of August 26 and 27 have been swarming time for the ant *Prenolepis sharpii* Forel. Numerous examples were attracted to lights in the house. *Pheidole megacephala* thereby became more abundant indoors in the living room. On the cement hearth there, I observed a large hunting spider, *Heteropoda regia* (Fabr.) standing high on its legs—on tiptoes, one might say—the reason being several *Pheidole* workers running about under and near her. She appeared safe, but lifted one and the other of her foremost legs when ants became too inquisitive. The ants would not do more than stop a moment at her pedal extremities and made no attempt to scale them. I flicked several queen *Prenolepis* to, or across where she stood, and on two or three occasions the spider stooped down suddenly on all her legs to grab the ant. Thus she consumed several, so they could not have been very distasteful. The spider resumed her stilted posture as soon as a queen ant was captured. She might have avoided the *Pheidole* by rushing elsewhere, but when I disturbed her about half an hour after I first saw her she was still standing with her body raised well off the floor.