

Backyard Biodiversity

On SCOPE's Biodiversity episode, Julia checked out the biodiversity of ants in her backyard. Here's how you can try the activity at home:



What you need:

Gardening gloves
Paintbrush
Magnifying glass
Little containers with lids

What to do:

1. Put on the gardening gloves to protect your hands from ant bites.
2. Have a good look around your backyard to find as many different types of ants as possible. Make sure you check all the different areas in your backyard, e.g. in trees, leaf litter, between rocks, on concrete etc.
3. When you find an ant, use the paintbrush to gently sweep it into a container. Only place one ant in each small container.
4. After you have finished, grab a magnifying glass and check out the ants you collected. Have a look at their size, shape and colour and use these to work out how many different ant species are in your backyard!
5. Once you have finished, make sure you release the ants back to where you found them, so they can get back to work!

What's happening?

Ants, along with bees and wasps, are known as social insects. Social, because they live in big groups or colonies which can have up to thousands or even millions of individuals! An ant colony has one or more queens who stay in the nest and lay eggs.

The ants you see crawling around your back yard are most likely female worker ants, who work together to find food and maintain the nest.

The different areas in your backyard are known as microhabitats – small areas within a larger habitat that have slightly different conditions. After checking out the ants you collected, you will probably find that different types of ants live in each different microhabitat.

Ant biodiversity is actually a really good measure of an ecosystem's health – ants aerate the soil by building tunnels for their nests, they recycle the nutrients from dead animals and plants and they can even help spread seeds and control pests!