



2021 Eagle Hill Institute
Online Natural History Seminars

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The Worlds of the Ants: Natural History, Cultural History, and Research Perspectives

Aaron M. Ellison
October 5th–19th, 2021

Ants are hailed as “the little things that run the world.” They evolved long before people and are likely to persist long after the ongoing Sixth Extinction. For the millennia of our history, ants have been metaphors and mirrors of the human condition. And in the last fifty years, the potential for symbioses between ants and humans has been considered and increasingly realized. This five-part seminar introduces participants to the many worlds of ants. We begin with basic myrmecology: exactly what is an ant, their early and ongoing evolution, and how they are identified and classified. While surveying the ecosystem services and disservices ants provide, we will learn about classical and contemporary methods for studying ant ecology and behavior. We then turn to a more detailed exposition and analysis of symbioses between ants and humans that can be found in mythology, art, cinema, literature, agriculture, mining, and cybernetics. This analysis traces the complex networks of paths from depicting ant colonies as individual organisms through recognizing them as paradigms of self-assembly and to their utility for solving practical engineering problems. We conclude with a discussion of the feedbacks between changing human social norms and the language and scientific descriptions used in myrmecology. This continuous socio-cultural-ecological evolution presages further constructive symbioses between ants and people.

Scheduling Details

October 5, 7, 12, 14, and 19
7PM–9PM ET

Participants need to have a Zoom account (<https://zoom.us> sign up for zoom is free). You will receive a secure link to join the instructor before each class. Classes will be recorded so participants can review them or make up missed ones.

For more information regarding seminar costs and registration please visit:

<https://www.eaglehill.us/programs/sems-online/general-info.shtml>

About the Instructor

Aaron Ellison (aaron@ssfors.com) is the Senior Research Fellow in Ecology (Emeritus) at Harvard University’s Harvard Forest, a Founding Principal of Sound Solutions for Sustainable Science, Boston, MA, and a photographer, sculptor, and writer. He studies the disintegration and reassembly of ecosystems following natural and anthropogenic disturbances, with a particular focus on the intersecting worlds of ants and carnivorous plants. He is the author of *A Field Guide to the Ants of New England*, *A Primer of Ecological Statistics*, *Vanishing Point*, and *Scaling in Ecology with a Model Ecosystem*.

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