



Audubon Butterfly Garden
and Insectarium
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Honey-pot Ants Now at Audubon Butterfly Garden and Insectarium

(New Orleans, La.) – On Tuesday, November 19, honey-pot ants made their sweet debut at Audubon Butterfly Garden and Insectarium. The new colony is now on display in the Main Hall of the Butterfly Garden and Insectarium, across from the popular leafcutter ant exhibit.

Honey-pot ants are usually found in arid or semi-arid habitats, and the species (*Myrmecocystus mexicanus*) on display at the Butterfly Garden and Insectarium comes from particularly hot, dry parts of the southwestern United States.

Honey-pot ants do not make honey. Rather, they make honey-like liquids that are stored in the ants themselves!

When rains come to the desert and food is abundant, honey-pot ants will hunt for insects to eat. But, they also collect sugary liquids from special structures (extrafloral nectaries) on plants and from insects (that make something called honeydew). Some adult workers are fed these sweet liquids, and their abdomens become engorged with fluid. These worker ants are called “repletes.”

Repletes cling to the “ceiling” of whatever underground chamber they are in and serve as living storage units of food for the rest of the colony. When it is too dry above ground to forage, honey-pot ants will get the repletes in their colony to regurgitate some nectar or honeydew, thus keeping the colony fed and healthy.

“This two-year old colony was a wonderful donation that has been driven here all the way from Arizona, where it started with the collection of just one mated queen ant,” said Butterfly Garden and Insectarium Director of Animals and Visitor Programs Jayme Necaise. “We are really happy that the big repletes have been increasing in number quickly for us– I think our visitors will be impressed and amazed when they see these ‘extra round’ ants hanging from the top of the nest.”

In Australia, honey-pot ants are eaten by indigenous people as sweets and considered a delicacy.

[Isaac’s Ant Foundation](#) generously donated this fascinating new colony to the Butterfly Garden and Insectarium.

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