



“Musing from the Hill” by Susan Crossett

as seen on the *Dunkirk Observer* on Fridays
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Those Teeny Tiny Ants Are Back

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I was agreeable to letting them visit as long as they cooperated so I could take pictures. That required time because most of those I took were so close up they came out blurred. "Delete" is a marvelous invention. As for the ants, I was patient. VERY patient. Even when they weren't.

But that was then. I have good pictures now and am prepared to move on. Shooting in March of 2020, I knew Musings were full through April (at least) so this had to be scheduled for a year from when these little nuisances first appeared.

Truly, if you have been fortunate enough never to encounter this little pest (I suppose I could almost term them pets for they're too small to be much of a bother), they really are called Teeny Tiny Ants. Look it up.

I found “11-tiny-ants-you-can-find-in-your-house.” Jeepers, I'd only seen one kind (which seemed like quite enough). Listed first are “Acrobat Ants,” no longer than 0.13 inches with a unique heart-shaped abdomen. Good luck looking for that!

“Big-Headed Ants” are #2. The workers are roughly 0.063 inches long though the “seed crackers – those for which the species has earned its title – can grow up to 0.13 inches in length.” You can check for those big heads. My eyes aren't that sharp.

“Caribbean Crazy Ants” are third on the list but we can forget about those.

You can tell #4, “Crazy Ants,” from the Caribbean ones because of their erratic movements and #5, Ghost Ants which prefer Florida and Hawaii though can hitch a ride on imports from those states.

“Little Black Ants (ours with a pseudonym), #6, are those to which I refer though this site says they can



be confused with #7, Odorous (smell bad if squished), Pharaoh #8 with a yellowy head and body, red or brown abdomen, or #10, Sugar which were native to Australia. Rover Ants, #9, are more common in the South and, #11, Thief Ants which prefer to build their nests close to other ant colonies so they can steal food rather than foraging.

Even my best pictures shown no color other than black. Not that I expected any. So Little Black Ants they are. (If you want to be frightened, check out some of the enlargements on the internet. My guys look pretty docile.)

Further reading tells me these are native to North America and are shiny black. Monomorphic means they all look the same with just one caste of workers and polygyne, meaning the nest could have than one queen.

“*Monomorium minimum*” (suppose there's a *Monomorium maximum*?) is only 1 to 2 cm long for the workers and 4 to 5 cm in length for the queen(s). Not choosy in their appetites they'll eat anything from bird droppings to dead insects. They also tend aphids (remember? I wrote about that!) to harvest honeydew. (So you just thought it came from a melon!)

In mid-summer the ants perform their nuptial flight and mate in midair. The male dies not much later. (No comment.) The queen then sheds her wings, builds a new nest and lays her eggs. And so the ants continue their anty business.

Their primary access roads are right across the back of my kitchen sink. (I can see them disappearing into a tiny ant-sized crack.) And, yes, of course I have all manner of sprays but that's simply too close to where I prepare food and wash dishes. (I did order ant killer but discovered it's to spread around the exterior of the house. Nah.) Squishing will have to do for now.

Last night I saw two side-by-side racing along as fast as their little feet would take them. Late for curfew, I surmised.

They stop frequently. Are they checking something I can't see? or just resting? They are tiny indeed for the great distances they cover.

So, honestly folks, I'm through with them now. I have my pictures. I need no more.

But how do I get my message across to them?



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