



FLAAR
MESOAMÉRICA

ARBOREAL ANT NESTS **COLONIES OF ANTS**

High in Treetops

Nicholas Hellmuth

Ant nest.

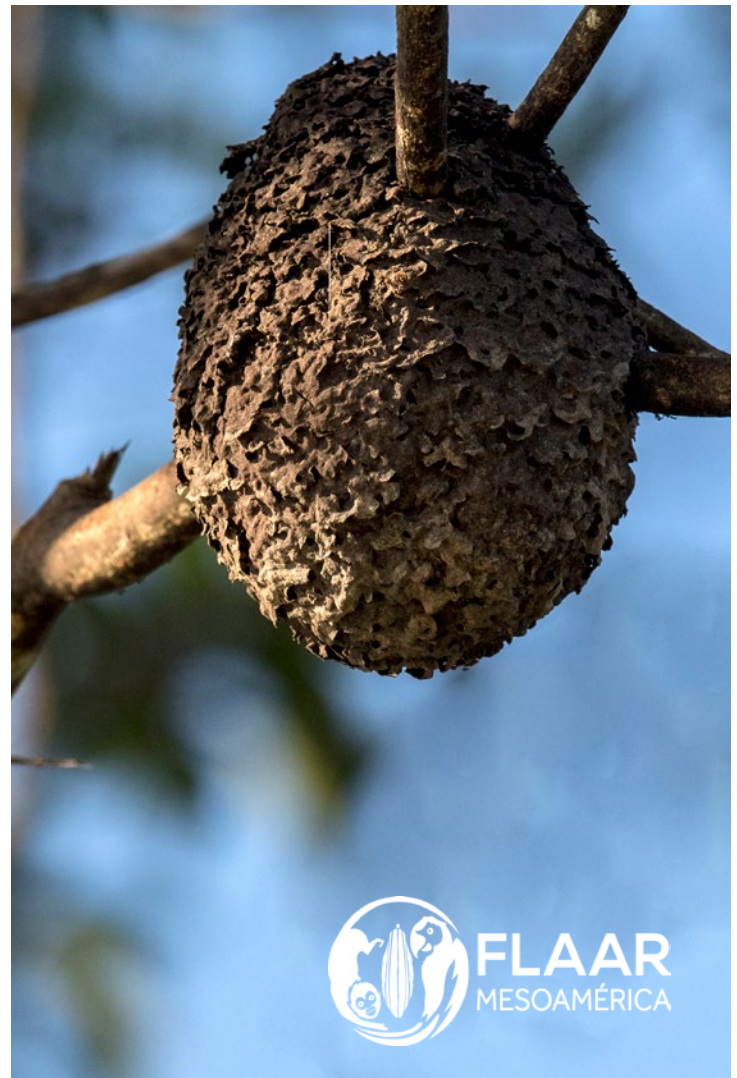
Camera Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III Canon EF 100MM F/2.8 MACRO
USM 1/250 f/18.0 ISO / 640
Photography by: Nicholas Hellmuth FLAAR Mesoamérica.



ARBOREAL ANT NESTS

COLONIES OF ANTS

When I first saw all these dark nests I automatically assumed they were termite nests or wasp nests. Then a year later I found treetops in the Yaxha park that were also filled with many comparable dark nest groups. But now in 2019 we have an 800mm prime telephoto lens, and we have a Broncolor telephoto flash, and at Yaxha we could stand under the trees (on the Rio Polochic we were in a boat, swaying in the water, so no way to take precision photos even if the motor of the lancha was turned off).



Ant nest.

Camera Nikon D5 Nikon AF-S NIKKOR 600mm f/4e FL ED VR
speed 1/1250 F/7.1 ISO2000. Photography by: Nicholas Hellmuth
FLAAR Mesoamérica.

So now at Parque Nacional Yaxha Nakum Naranjo we can take photographs of the nests at higher resolution. So we now know it is ants that make these nests, not wasps or termites.

The goal of these photo essays is share our photographs with other people so they too can see that these are NOT wasp nests, NOT termite nests, and for sure NOT bee hives: these are arboreal ant nests. This is Guatemala, Central America.

Ant nest.
Camera Canon EOS 6D canon EF75-300mm f/4 5.6 speed 1/2000
f/6.3 ISO640.
Photography by: Nicholas Hellmuth FLAAR Mesoamérica.





Yes there are termite nests of the same color and shape: but they tend to be much much larger and usually only one per tree. And often termite nests are not as high up in the tree tops.

Yes there are wasp nests, but they tend to be much smaller or rounder (rather than oval). The really big wasp nests tend to be “glued” to the trunk, not hanging from branches. There are lots of wasp nests that do hang from trees, but usually not as high up, and not in colonies of a dozen-nests-per-tree.

Ant nest.

Here is a good example showing how many arboreal ant nests are in a single tree (Rio Polochic, Izabal and Alta Verapaz, Guatemala). We have found comparable colonies of dark ant nests in Parque Nacional Yaxha Nakum Naranjo, Peten. We will need a digiscope to get close-up photographs of the ants to allow a specialist to identify their species.

Ant nest.

Camera Canon EOS-6D Canon EF75-300mm f/4 5.6 speed 1/2000
f/6.3 ISO640.
Photography by: Melany Quiñonez FLAAR Mesoamérica.



Ant nest.

In this tree are more than 50 nests. We found about two or three places along the Rio Polochic with these kinds of colonies. We took a boat from Lake Izabal one or two hours upstream.



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Ant nest.
Camera Nikon D5 Nikon AF-S NIKKOR 600mm f/4e FL ED VR
speed 1/1250 F/7.1 ISO2000. Photography by: Nicholas Hellmuth
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Yes there are bee hives, but they tend to have tubular entrances; the nests tend to be inside cracks in the tree (or in the ground). The bee's tubular entrances can also be inside a termite nest or sticking out from an arboreal ant nest (but the off-white wasp that makes it's nest lower down and makes its nest using lots of leaves).

We have found and photographed a remarkable diversity of bee nests, wasp nests, and ant nests:

- Many sizes and shapes of wasp nests, different colors
- Two kinds of arboreal ant nests are the most common:

- Dark brown, in colonies, like the ones here
- Off-white, on green leaves, not high in treetops, in colonies of about two-per-tree, five-to-seven-per-colony (so in two adjacent trees); often with bee tunnel sticking out (so ants build the nest but bees "rent space" inside).

We are working to find all other sizes, shapes, and kinds of arboreal bee, wasp, ant, and termite nests in Parque Nacional Yaxha Nakum Naranja.



Ant nest.
Camera Canon EOS-6D Canon EF75-300mm f/4-5.6 1/2000 f/6.3
ISO /640
Photography by: Melany Quiñonez FLAAR Mesoamérica.



Ant nest.
Camera Nikon D5 Nikon AF-S NIKKOR 600mm f/4e FL ED VR
speed 1/2000 F/7.1 ISO2000. Photography by: Nicholas Hellmuth
FLAAR Mesoamérica.

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The colonies are sometimes in individual trees but can also be in several adjacent trees.

The photos of trees along the Rio Polochic show mostly lots of nests in individual trees. But I vaguely remember there may have also been additional nests in others next to each other. So the colonies are in tree areas; more than just in one single solitary tree.

At Yaxha the colonies are in about four adjacent trees; two were palo de Jiote if I remember correctly; but the other trees that held other parts of the same colony were different species.



Ant nest.
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speed 1/2000 F/7.1 ISO2000. Photography by: Nicholas Hellmuth
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What ant species are these?

There are 430 species of the genus *Crematogaster* (www.revolvy.com/page/Crematogaster). So it would be great if an ant specialist could cruise along the Rio Polochic with a digiscope and get close-up telephoto photos of individual ants so they can be identified. We do not have a digiscope (Zeiss or Swarovski brand are best).

Ant nest.

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