

Pest Profile



Photo credit: April Nobile, California Academy of Sciences
(Speciment CASENT0005719; from <https://www.antweb.org>)

Common Name: Owyhee harvester ant

Scientific Name: *Pogonomyrmex salinus*

Order and Family: Order Hymenoptera; Family Formicidae

Size and Appearance:

| | Length (mm) | Appearance |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Egg | | |
| Larva/Nymph | | |
| Adult | Workers range from 5 – 7 mm | <i>Pogonomyrmex</i> harvester ants are characterized by broad, boxy heads, 12-segmented antennae, a two-part waist, a pair of dorsal spines and a stinger. Many species have a set of long hairs (called a psammophore) on the posterior lower portion of the head, behind the mouthparts. The Owyhee harvester ant is highly textured with both lines (rugae) and punctures (punctate) which may replace the lines. They are deep red in color. |

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|-----------------------------|--|--|
| | | Colonies have one queen (monogynous). Queens are similar to workers but larger with a larger thorax. Female and male reproductive ants have wings. |
| Pupa (if applicable) | | |

Type of feeder (Chewing, sucking, etc.): Chewing

Host(s): Harvester ants in the genus *Pogonomyrmex* specialize in seeds but may forage on other foods (generalist and opportunistic).

Description of Damage (larvae and adults):

Because these ants primarily eat seeds (up to 90% of the diet), they are pests of agricultural systems, damaging crops but especially grasslands (pasture). They harvest seeds, defoliate plants, and remove young and old plants. The Owyhee harvester ant primarily affects the range by their clearing and feeding activities. These ants may enter houses and basements and have been known to disturb radioactive waste stored underground.

They also have a potent sting that causes persistent pain. The venom is considered the most toxic of insect venoms and its effects may spread through the lymphatic system. The venom may cause severe allergic reactions, other serious problems, and death of livestock, pets, and people. These ants sting in defense of the nest, so avoiding the nest area is a good idea.

They nest in open areas and also like some disturbance, like mowed lawns, and so are commonly found in lawns, playgrounds, managed fields, and along roads and sidewalks. The external nest area can be quite large, up to 2 m in diameter, and are easy to locate because the area is denuded of vegetation.

Their nests may cause problems for livestock and harvesting equipment and contribute to soil erosion and other problems.

The Owyhee harvester ant is found in some parts of Canada and the USA, including California, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

References:

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