

## Beneficial Species Profile



**Photo credit:** April Nobile, California Academy of Sciences  
(Specimen: CASET0005804; from [www.antweb.org](http://www.antweb.org))

**Common Name:** Red Imported Fire Ant (RIFA)

**Scientific Name:** *Solenopsis invicta*

**Order and Family:** Order Hymenoptera; Family Formicidae

**Size and Appearance:**

	<b>Length (mm)</b>	<b>Appearance</b>
<b>Egg</b>		
<b>Larva/Nymph</b>		White
<b>Adult</b>	Workers: 3.0 – 7.0 mm  Queens: up to 9 mm	All fire ants are characterized by several body features, including a relatively boxy-shaped head; 10-segmented antennae with the last segments enlarged as a club; the lack of spines on the back; a two-part waist; a prominent stinger; and the cuticle is typically free of texture or sculpture.  RIFA workers are polymorphic with the largest referred to as majors. They are reddish brown with a darker gaster (last segments of the abdomen).

		Male and female reproductive ants have wings with females resembling the workers.  Colonies may have a single queen or many queens (up to 20,000)
<b>Pupa (if applicable)</b>		White

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

**Host(s):** Generally, *Solenopsis* fire ants are omnivorous and generalists predators eating a variety of animals and plants.

**Description of Benefits (predator, parasitoid, pollinator, etc.):**

RIFA have the potential to be a form of biocontrol by feeding on many different kinds of pest insects. They prey upon the sugarcane borer (*Diatraea saccharalis*), larvae of the cotton boll weevil (*Anthonomus grandis*), the cotton leafhopper (*Pseudatomoscelis seriatus*), the tobacco budworm (*Heliothis virescens*), the cotton leafworm (*Alabama argillacea*), velvetbean caterpillar (*Anticarsia gemmatalis*), the eggs of the southern green stink bug (*Nezara viridula*), the soybean looper moth (*Pseudoplusia includens*), the pupae of pickleworms (*Diaphania nitidalis*), the pupae of the cowpea, the curculio beetle (*Chalcodermus aeneus*), both the eggs and adults of the striped earwig (*Labidura riparia*), armyworm caterpillars (*Spodoptera frugiperda*), the lesser corn stalk borer (*Elasmopalpus lignosellus*), larvae of the pecan weevil (*Curculio caryae*), Nantucket pine tip moth (*Rhyacionia frustrana*), green cloverworm (*Plathypena scabra*), the greenhouse whitefly (*Trialeurodes vaporariorum*), larvae of the rootstalk borer weevil (*Diaprepes abbreviatus*), the rice stink bug (*Oebalus pugnax*) and springtails as well as various aphids.

RIFA also prey on other insects and arachnids that affect humans and other animals, including flies (the biting mosquito, *Psorophora columbiae*, and the Asian tiger mosquito, *Aedes albopictus*), the horn fly (*Haematobia irritans*), the stable fly (*Stomoxys calcitrans*), the lone star tick (*Amblyomma americanum*), as well as termites.

Other benefits of the RIFA include a possible role in the decomposition of loblolly pine stumps, the reduction of soil acidity, removal of roadkill, and an important food source for the Florida swallow-tailed kites (during RIFA mating swarms).

The RIFA is an invasive and tramp species, native of South America. The RIFA now has a world-wide distribution. In the USA, the RIFA is found in mostly in the south with reports from Alabama, Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

**References:**

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