Ant Investigations

Background Info:

Ants are some of the planet's most widespread insects. Most species live in large colonies, sometimes numbering more than 250,000 ants, though some live in much smaller colonies of only a few dozen individuals. Ants perform many important ecological functions, such as dispersing seeds (like those of trilliums and violets), pollinating plants, circulating nutrients, and eating other nutrients.

Ants have a few fascinating physical characteristics as well. Scientists estimate that, depending on the species, ants can carry 10-50 times their own body weight. That's like a 150-lb. human carrying an SUV or a rhinoceros! Also, like all insects, ants have an exoskeleton and they lack lungs; instead, ants breathe through tiny holes in their exoskeletons called spiracles.

Materials:

- Active ant hill(s)

Activity How-to:

Observe the ant hill for ant activity. Answer as many of the following questions as you can:

- What are the ants doing?
- Where do the ants go when they leave the nest/ant hill?
- Are the ants eating anything? If so, what?
- Are the ants carrying anything back to the nest? If so, what? What is the heaviest thing you observe an ant carrying?
- Do all the ants look the same? Are they all the same size?
- Do you see any ant eggs or larva (young, grub-looking things)?
- Are any of the ants working together?
- What else do you notice?