The Super Ant

You have probably

seen a single ant

scurrying across the

kitchen floor. You

can be certain that

where there is one

ant, there are several.

Or more like

several thousand.

Ants live in colonies. The colony

is known as a super organism.

The thousands of ants that make up

the colony operate as a unified whole,

almost as if they are one

organism.

Individual ants sacrifice themselves

for the sake of the colony. Each ant has

a very specialized job. Some attend to

the needs of the colony’s queen. She

becomes too large to move on her own,

so a group of ants may do it for her.

Some ants’ sole job is to remove eggs as

the queen lays them and bring them to a

room in the nest called the nursery. Ant

attendants in the nursery do nothing else

in their entire lives except take care of

the colony’s larvae.

Other ants have a little more adventure.

They spend their lives scouting for

food. This adventure comes with peril,

however. Like when a giant human shoe

comes crashing down on top of them.

Ants are excellent communicators.

One of their important methods of communication

is touch. An ant’s antenna

may have as many as thirteen joints,

making them superb feelers. Ants spend

an incredible amount of time cleaning

their antennae, which is a good indication

of how important they are.

Ants also communicate by smell. This

is how they let other ants know about a

good source of food. They don’t go back

to the nest and explain what the food

smells like and where it is. No, the ants

who have found the food produce a trail

of pheromones, which are like invisible

bread crumbs. All the other ants in the

colony recognize the scent and follow

it to the food.

Smell is so important to ants that if a

strange ant walks into a colony of thousands

of ants, colony members immediately

recognize it as a stranger and drive

it out or even kill the intruder.