

Clever Colonies

Everyone knows the world of bugs is fascinating, but who knew that African termites would have so much to teach us? Where might you find these amazing creatures? Scattered throughout the **wilderness** of Africa, termite colonies can be found standing up to forty feet tall! If you were **gliding** over the ground in an airplane, you could see them scattered among the trees. In fact, trees from the **region** might be growing on the mounds!

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Scientists are studying the termite family, called a **colony**, and its **shelter**, called a mound. They've been making some **unexpected** discoveries about both. Now what do these amazing structures and their builders have to show us? Well, to begin with, termite families are amazing! When a new colony starts, the king and queen work together to raise their young. When the young grow into juveniles, they become workers and start to care for the very young. When the juveniles mature, they might become soldiers, workers, or new kings or queens.

The king and queen stay together throughout their lives, which might be as long as fifty to a hundred years! There can be several kings and queens in one colony.

Termite mounds are also amazing. Underground, beneath the tall mound, termite nests can be up to six feet wide! At first, scientists thought the tall mound was there to keep the termite nest from becoming **overheated**. However, they

discovered that the termite nest stays a **constant** temperature because the ground stays a constant temperature. Rather than controlling temperature, the mound above keeps the **climate** inside from becoming too humid. It does this by circulating air.

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Since the mound is always being worn away by weather, the termites add **layer** after layer to it each year. The climate inside is very important, because it has to be just right for the termites' survival. It also has to be just right for the food some termite species grow, which is fungus!

As scientists keep studying termites and their homes, we learn more about how to build our own homes. Perhaps someday your home will be modeled after a termite mound, so whether a blizzard is blowing or the sun is blazing, your home will have a constant, cozy temperature inside.

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