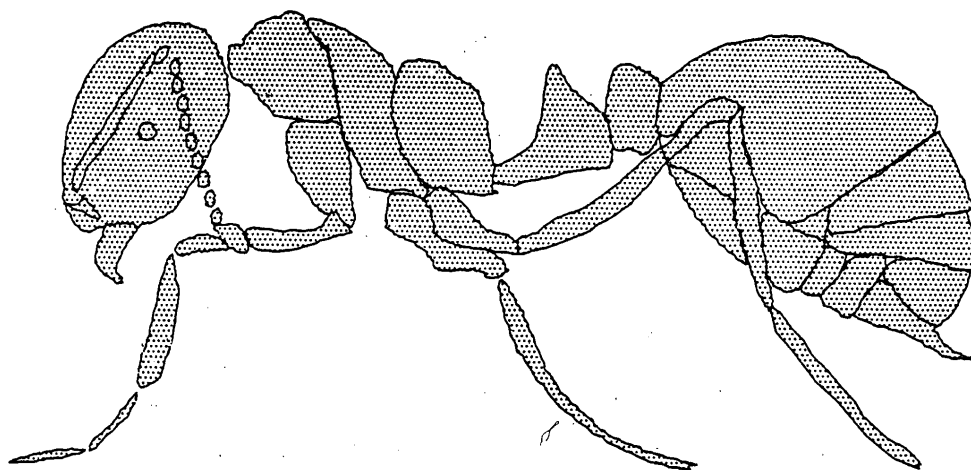


# 1997 IMPORTED FIRE ANT RESEARCH CONFERENCE

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APRIL 14 - 16, 1997



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# ARE RED IMPORTED FIRE ANTS A THREAT TO HATCHING SEA TURTLES?

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## ABSTRACT

Red imported fire ants (*Solenopsis invicta*) have been observed foraging in Loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*) and Green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) nests in Florida. *Solenopsis invicta* are attracted to mucous and moisture, and may establish foraging tunnels into sea turtle nests shortly after egg-laying, making pipping turtles vulnerable to predation. To test the potential impact of *S. invicta* on pipping sea turtles, we conducted experiments on a surrogate species (*Pseudomys nelsoni*). Over 70% of the viable hatchlings were killed by *S. invicta* during pipping or shortly after hatching. Beach surveys indicate that *S. invicta* are abundant on beaches and dunes throughout Florida.