Honey, I blew up my tummy!!

How far can you go for your honey? Will you like to store some in your abdomen so that it can be used later? That is exactly what some ants of genera *Myrmecocystus*, *Cataglyphis*, *Melophorus*, *Leptomyrmex*, *Plagiolepis Prenolepis* and *Camponotus* do. These specialised, sterile worker ants (also called honeypot ants, repletes, plerergates, or rotunds) serve as living larders (cool storerooms) for other members of their colony. Worker ants feed the repletes nectar up to the point their abdomen swells up with golden, sugary liquid and becomes sedentary. The repletes' hard dorsal sclerites (stiff plates) are connected by a softer, flexible arthrodial membrane. This membrane expands widely to make room for the liquid when the abdomen fills.

They are used as a source of nutrients by other ants in the colony when food is scarce. For getting the stored liquid, the worker ants poke and prod the antennae of honeypot ants a bit. This makes the rotunds to upchuck the stored liquid from its crop (a thin-walled expanded part of the alimentary tract for storing undigested food). They are so lucrative as a resource that ants of other colonies may also raid and plunder the repletes and enslave them!!! Honeypot ants namely *Melophorus bagoti* and *Camponotus* spp. serve as a local delicacy among indigenous Australians who use these as a source of sugar. These ants inhabit the desert and other arid environments of Australia, southern Africa, southwestern part of the United States' and Mexico.

Photo: Wikipedia, Alamy

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