

Ivan T. Sanderson put forward the idea that some species of termites may teleport food supplies in emergencies.



Ivan T. Sanderson in his home office, *circa 1965.*

In 1938 Ivan Sanderson was studying the ATTA of Leaf-Cutter ant. Two Dutch scientists were his colleagues. In the course of their studies they became thoroughly mystified by a feature of the behaviour of the queen termite which seemed to defy rational explanation. They would break into one of the chambers containing a queen termite, and after covering it up again, would find that 'in a matter of minutes she had vanished'.

The queen termite's chamber is built underground, with walls up to three inches thick. It is perforated by a number of tiny portholes, giving access to the termites which feed and clean the queen and carry off her eggs to the nurseries. The queen spends her whole time eating and laying eggs, and since she is about 1000 times the size of the workers there is no question of her leaving the chamber in the normal way. Here writes Sanderson, is the problem:

'It has been observed that, if you do get to a queen chamber, and carefully slice a side off it, you may observe the tightfitting insect within and can mark it carefully with a squirt of dye. As long as the chamber is left open, or resealed only by a piece of glass, nothing happens. Often the queen dies or is taken apart by the workers. Sometimes she just goes on egg-laying - dye and all. However, if you cover her up even for a few minutes, something happens. She vanishes!'

This could well be explained, and was originally thought to have been so and adequately, by the notion that her workers killed her and removed the remains. But don't forget the dye, which was in some cases sprayed on in very complex patterns.

'Further digging in some cities within hours brought to light, to the dumbfoundment of everybody, apparently the same queen, all duly dyed with intricate identifying marks, dozens of feet away in another super-concrete-hard cell, happily eating, excreting and producing eggs!'

Sanderson continued to expound a belief that the ATTA queens travelled from chamber to chamber by teleportation.