

How animals send messages

This page is from the *Oxford Children's Book of Science*.

FINDING FOOD

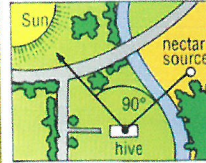
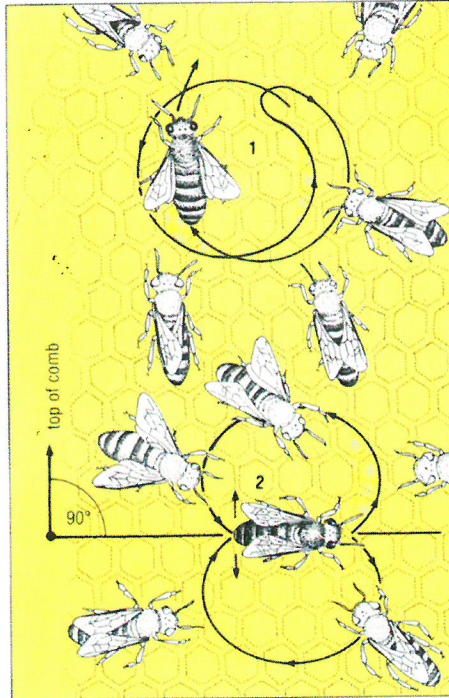
Most animals must find food to survive. Sometimes, they will go to great lengths to avoid sharing it with others. However, some animals will cooperate and communicate in their search for food.

Bees have evolved a very elaborate system of passing on information about the location of food. In a hive, bees perform a dance in which they wiggle their bodies while moving in a particular direction. Using this dance, they can communicate to other bees that there are flowers with a good supply of nectar in a certain direction relative to the Sun. Their movements also give an indication of how far away the supply is.

DANGER AROUND

Many animals have a special call which warns other members of the group when danger is present. This is particularly true of birds, which can produce very loud alarm calls. Near airfields, recordings of bird alarm calls are often played back in order to get rid of flocks that might interfere with the planes. At airfields, humans regard birds as a danger. However, for the birds, the planes are the danger.

Some animals listen for the alarm calls of other creatures to give them warning. Others



Left and above When a worker bee returns to the hive, she does a dance to tell other bees where to find flowers with nectar in. If the flowers are close, she does a simple, round dance (1). But if they are further away, she does a complicated 'waggle' dance (2). The speed at which the tail waggles indicates the distance of the flowers. In the middle part of the dance, her direction relative to the hive gives the direction of the flowers relative to the Sun.

post sentries to look out for danger and give warnings to the rest of the group. That way, the others can safely concentrate on feeding or drinking. Meerkats are like this. They can stand up almost vertically and swivel their heads through a very wide angle to spot danger approaching.



Left Many animals help each other by giving warning of approaching danger. This meerkat in the Kalahari Desert, southern Africa, has been posted as a sentry to stand up as high as possible. His job is to warn the rest of the group if he senses a predator in the area.