

# Bees learn and 'teach' others

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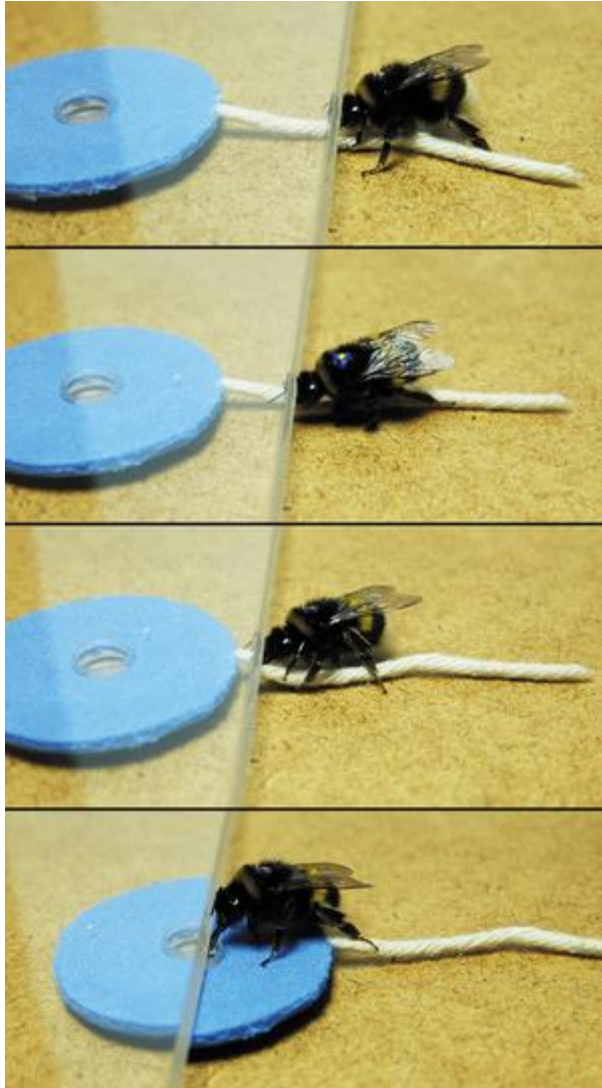


Photo Sylvain Alem

Bumblebees can learn to manipulate objects — and can pass their knowledge on to other bees.

Lars Chittka at Queen Mary University of London and his colleagues presented bumblebees (*Bombus terrestris*) with a disc that had been filled with sugar water and placed under a transparent sheet of Plexiglas. To get at the disc, the bees had to pull on a string attached to it (**pictured**). Just 2 bees out of almost 300 worked out how to do this on their own; most needed stepwise training, after which more than 80% of bees were successful.

When untrained bees watched other bees getting the sugar water, they were able to learn the trick. Seeding untrained colonies with a single trained 'demonstrator' and then pairing bees from the colony with the disc apparatus eventually resulted in roughly half of the foragers learning the task. None of the foragers in the control colonies could pull the disc out.

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