Animal Language Factfile:

Honey bees

In a new series, **Hazel Price** *looks at honey bee communication*



You might think that communicating is something that only humans do, but you'd be wrong. Linguists have studied how animals communicate with each other for years and they have found out some very cool things about animals because of this. Take, for example, the honey bee.

These bees have a lot more to them than an appetite for nectar and a mean sting. They are, in fact, very intelligent. Being a bee can be tough – think about all that work! Bees need to visit lots of flowers to get the nectar to make honey and this can involve flying a long way each day (some reports say that to make one jar of honey, a honey bee needs to visit 1 million flowers!). One way that bees communicate to make their busy buzzy lives easier is by dancing.

The 'waggle dance' is something that forager bees do to tell other bees in their colony where they can find a good source of nectar. The waggle dance consists of runs and turns that the bees perform in a figure of 8. This tells the other bees in the colony whether the food is near or far and in which direction it can be found. The angle that the bee turns when dancing tells the other bees the direction of the source of food in relation to the sun. How much the bee waggles on the runs tell the bees how far they are from the source. The longer the bee dances, the better the food source is. Some research has even suggested that bees can tell the difference between colours.

So, we know that bees communicate – but is the waggle dance actually language? What do you think? ¶

Did you know?

Some scientists have suggested that waggle dancing might be part of a honey bee's genetic make-up rather than being something that it learns how to do.

Honey bees also do a 'tremble dance'. This dance is believed to be used by forager honey bees when they need help collecting nectar.

Watch honey bees do the waggle dance at youtube.com/watch?v=LOZrNs22FAU