

Working Together

by Dan Smith

Part 1

Nature is full of incredible animals working together. This is called 'group behaviour', and for some animals it's the only way they can survive.

One of the main reasons why animals work together in groups is to protect themselves.

Meerkats, which live in the African savannah, form communities of as many as 50 individuals. These communities are known as 'mobs' or 'gangs'. Meerkats dig burrows into the sand and while their young play, the adults stand guard, watching for predators. If a meerkat sees a threat, it will squeal and stare in the direction of the threat so that all the other meerkats know where the danger is coming from.

Crows also use group behaviour to protect themselves from predators. If a hawk is spotted lurking around crow nests, crows work together to drive the hawk away. The crows will make a lot of noise and they will swoop and nip the predator. This is known as 'mobbing'. Imagine being mobbed by dozens of angry crows!

Sea otters rarely come onto land, so when they sleep, they form rafts to keep themselves afloat. They do this by grouping together and holding hands – which looks exactly as cute as it sounds! Some rafts of sea otters have been known to contain up to 200 individuals.

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Part 2

Another reason why animals work together in groups is to help them hunt and gather food.

Killer whales work in teams of up to 40 members. They locate their prey using echolocation, which is a series of clicking sounds that bounce off things in the water – including their prey! They then work together to get the prey alone, or into small groups, before moving in for the kill.

A honey bee colony has workers which spend most of their time gathering nectar from plants. They use the nectar as food. When a worker bee finds a good place to gather nectar, it tells the other workers where it is by doing a special dance. They then collect the nectar and take it back to the colony to share it with the other bees and to feed the young, which are called larva.

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Part 3

Some of the most incredible groups of animals are the smallest. You might hardly even notice a single ant, but it is part of one of the most awesome groups in nature. Some species of ants live in colonies of just a few dozen, while others live in super colonies containing millions of individuals, but it is more common for ant colonies to be made up of several thousand ants. Different ants in the colony have different jobs. Worker ants collect food, dig tunnels, and take care of the eggs. A queen ant lives deep inside the colony and her job is to lay the eggs. Drone ants have wings, and their job is to fly away and start new colonies. Some colonies even have large soldier ants to protect the colony. By co-operating together, colonies of ants can achieve incredible things like digging huge nests, forming bridges to cross gaps, or forming rafts to survive flooding. They even farm other insects for food. Ants in a colony work so well together, it's almost as if they are each a tiny part of one giant animal.