

# Females tagged in wasp mating game

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(Phys.org)—The flick of an antenna may be how a male wasp lays claim to his harem, according to new research at Simon Fraser University.

A team of [biologists](#), led by former PhD graduate student Kelly Ablard, found that when a male targeted a female, he would approach from her from the left side, and once in range, uses the tip of his antenna to tap her antenna.

Ablard suggests the act transfers a yet unidentified specimen-specific [pheromone](#) onto the female's antenna that marks the female as "out of bounds," or "tagged."

The tagging-pheromone helps a male relocate the females he tagged, and deters non-tagging males from approaching tagged females.

Males who tag females are much quicker courters than their competitors, and thus are likely in better condition physically, Ablard notes. "It is the first male to encounter a female that is likely perceived by females to be high-quality," she says. "Tagged females' [avoidance behavior](#) of 'unfamiliar' males suggests that tagged females attain a fitness advantage."

The research, published in the journal *Behavioural Processes*, was carried out in a biology lab at SFU over the past several years.

Ablard, who defended her thesis in December and is set to receive her degree this spring, earlier studied olfactory communication in the slender

and slow loris, a small nocturnal primate found in southern India and throughout [southeast Asia](#), respectively.

**More information:** Paper: [www.sciencedirect.com/science/...  
ii/S0376635712002501](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0376635712002501)

Provided by Simon Fraser University

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