

# How ants investigate the housing market when searching for their ideal home

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This shows a *Temnothorax albipennis* colony inside a nest. New research by Ph.D. student Carolina Doran and Professor Nigel R. Franks of the University of Bristol's School of Biological Sciences has shown experimentally that rock ants continually monitor their neighboring real estate so as to know exactly what new homes are potentially available. Credit: (c) Professor Nigel R Franks, University of Bristol

An immediate and chronic concern for many of us is how the housing market influences the whole economy: surprisingly ants also have issues

over the value of new homes, researchers from the University of Bristol have found.

Colonies of rock ants (*Temnothorax albipennis*) need to find ideal homes for the safety and productivity of the queen mother and all of her offspring. They are regularly confronted with the dilemma of whether to move to a better property or remain in their current one, but unlike humans who are susceptible to housing bubbles, ants seem to invest in their housing market in ways that are consistent and rational.

PhD student Carolina Doran and Professor Nigel R. Franks of Bristol's School of Biological Sciences showed experimentally that in order to be ahead of the game, rock ants continually monitor their neighbouring real estate so as to know exactly what new homes are potentially available.

Moreover, their search effort is tuned to the quality of the nest they currently inhabit. They put more effort into finding new homes when they are in a poor one and search less when they are in deluxe accommodation.

Carolina Doran said: "This strategy of adjusting their information gathering according to their actual needs and the real value of higher rungs on the property ladder may help [ants](#) to evaluate their housing market in a measured and thorough way that puts many of us to shame."

The research is published today in the Royal Society Journal *Biology Letters*.

**More information:** 'Economic investment by ant colonies in searches for better homes' by Carolina Doran, Tom Pearce, Aaron Connor, Thomas Schlegel, Elizabeth Franklin, Ana B. Sendova-Franks and Nigel R. Franks in *Biology Letters*. [rsbl.royalsocietypublishing.org ... .1098/rsbl.2013.0685](http://rsbl.royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rsbl.2013.0685)

Provided by University of Bristol

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