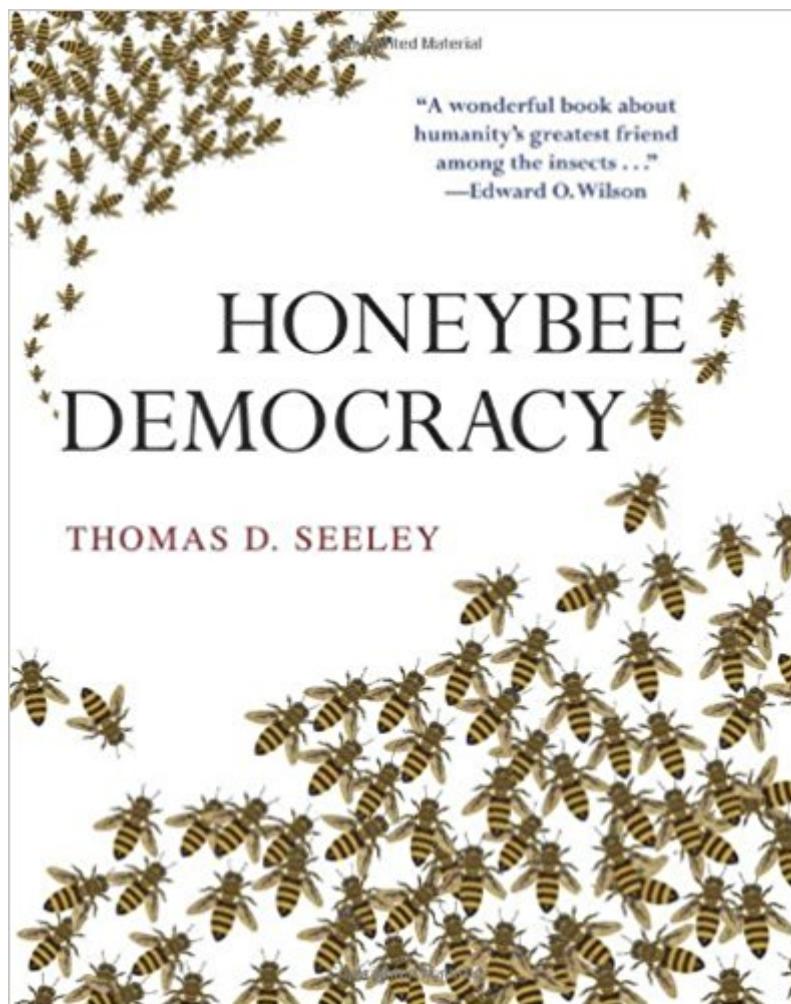


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# Honeybee Democracy



## Synopsis

Honeybees make decisions collectively--and democratically. Every year, faced with the life-or-death problem of choosing and traveling to a new home, honeybees stake everything on a process that includes collective fact-finding, vigorous debate, and consensus building. In fact, as world-renowned animal behaviorist Thomas Seeley reveals, these incredible insects have much to teach us when it comes to collective wisdom and effective decision making. A remarkable and richly illustrated account of scientific discovery, *Honeybee Democracy* brings together, for the first time, decades of Seeley's pioneering research to tell the amazing story of house hunting and democratic debate among the honeybees. In the late spring and early summer, as a bee colony becomes overcrowded, a third of the hive stays behind and rears a new queen, while a swarm of thousands departs with the old queen to produce a daughter colony. Seeley describes how these bees evaluate potential nest sites, advertise their discoveries to one another, engage in open deliberation, choose a final site, and navigate together--as a swirling cloud of bees--to their new home. Seeley investigates how evolution has honed the decision-making methods of honeybees over millions of years, and he considers similarities between the ways that bee swarms and primate brains process information. He concludes that what works well for bees can also work well for people: any decision-making group should consist of individuals with shared interests and mutual respect, a leader's influence should be minimized, debate should be relied upon, diverse solutions should be sought, and the majority should be counted on for a dependable resolution. An impressive exploration of animal behavior, *Honeybee Democracy* shows that decision-making groups, whether honeybee or human, can be smarter than even the smartest individuals in them.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Not only is the research completely sound and refreshing, the graphic representation of compelling information is truly revelatory. If you are going to be shipwrecked on an island, even if that island has no honeybees, you should take this one book. It just seems that Thomas Seeley has compiled a most fascinating explanation of one of the bees' most curious and intelligent behaviors - and the graphic illustration and charts lend insight in clean, straight-forward, "ahh-hah" kind of ways, less understandable until now given the new, brilliant and powerfully simple conveyance. The Epilogue should be read first because it provides the most fitting setup: Martin Lindauer observed a clustered swarm of bees on a bush and noticed that the waggle-dancing bees were covered in black soot, red brick dust and grey soil. Calling them dirty dancers, a multiple of them were obviously attempting to convince others regarding the merits of a nearby chimney. That started his research into bee group decision making, and thus, Thomas Seeley's remarkable treatise on the subject. This would be a fascinating coffee table book, with insightful information for any curious book-flipper. For seasoned beekeepers, the photos, illustrations and information presented solidifies and exemplifies many of the things that we already know. Best example: on page 38, Figure 2.12 is a photo illustrating the underside of some house bees and shows how the wax chips are produced from the abdomens of the worker bees. I know this but had never seen it before. To see the photos is to gain much deeper understanding, and that quality of knowledge shared is represented throughout the entire book. As an informational tome, this book is beautiful, fascinating, timely, informative, curious, insightfully supportive, educational and moves what we know forward in terms of an improved general understanding of the bees' intricate and remarkable intelligence. Thank you Thomas Seeley, your illustrator, your graduate and undergraduate research students. I feel like a more comprehensive beekeeper by the richer understanding that your work has provided. It's a terrific book for the lay person and experienced beekeeper alike. Beautiful and fascinating!

Tom Seeley shares his 30+ years of work with honeybees to reveal how these beautiful creatures, living in dense societies, are able to make collective, speedy, and accurate decisions. This is a remarkable book that showcases both the creativity of researchers who have uncovered the secrets of bees as well as the success of one of Earth's most adaptive inhabitants. This book clearly contains lessons on how groups can make better decisions, but you don't need the lessons to

appreciate and enjoy what Seeley has to say about these little marvels. I happen to like reading about the logic behind the research and some of the experiments that Seeley and others have conducted, but if that isn't for you, you can browse sections and get to the nice summaries the author provides at the end of most sections. In the end, you will see that democracy really works.

This book is destined to be a modern classic. It is a blend of the very best science and inspired, eloquent writing. In 230 beautifully illustrated pages Seeley, a Cornell U professor, tells the complete story of a nearly perfect representational democracy. Bees have developed a decision making process that allows them to make a rational decision about a live or die choice they must make: where to make their next home. Seeley has deciphered all of the elements of this annual process and lets us in on the secrets of the bees. He is careful to show scientific verification to all of his ideas and documents the painstaking observations that back up his assertions. Before reading this book I was an admirer of the evolved social community that makes up a bee hive. Now I am in awe of these wonderful creatures. I thank Thomas D. Seeley for sharing his love and enthusiasm as well as his remarkable expertise.

I am a scientist by nature and trade, though I am a geologist with no level of expertise or knowledge in regards to insects. After hearing another story about colony collapse disorder on NPR, I researched the available books on honeybees at (was surprise at how few there are) and settled on Dr. Seeley's book. Great read! I found the structure of the book well thought out, each chapter leading into subsequent chapters. Each chapter also dealt with a discrete topic and flushed out the details thoroughly. Also - I enjoyed the fact that his writing style was easily accessible for the laymen. Some books of this ilk get caught in up what level of jargon or detail to use, but Dr. Seeley found a very reasonable position on this. Being an analytical type person, I really enjoyed how each theory was tested and described. The reader will see for example the criteria bees use for siting new hives, how they test some of those criteria, and of course the main topic - how the scouts tell the colony about their searches for new homes and then how the colony reaches a consensus amongst the various choices the scouts bring back. The reader should understand that this is not an all-encompassing book on bees, there is not much in here on hive construction or life cycles or how foragers do their thing. But there was enough on those topics for a novice like me to understand the context of what Dr. Seeley was writing about. At the end, I was not entirely convinced of using the bees "democratic" style in real life human situations. But it was good that Dr. Seeley gave real anecdotal examples from his university meetings and from New England town hall meetings to

discuss it - other authors may have simply made the theoretical premise and left it at that. I look forward to reading his other book - *Wisdom of the Hive* - to read up on the foragers. Just wish the price would come down some! We get spoiled on the \$5-\$10 cheap paperbacks and are lamentably surprised at the price of niche scientific books. But Dr. Seeley does a great job here.

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