



## A Little Story about a Bee and a Fly

I have no TV here, but do have a screen that provides plenty of entertainment ... and I'm not talking about my computer; I mean the screen that covers the window behind my desk!

There are plenty of insects in this neighbourhood - having a river close by will do that - and because I sometimes leave my front door open for fresh air, it frequently happens that a fly or other insect ends up buzzing on this screen on the inside, trying to get out. This is indeed 'entertainment', as different insects follow quite different 'strategies' when this happens. I try to 'help out' by cracking the screen open at one side slightly, and it is very interesting to see which insects can then sometimes escape, and which ones never do.

Bees and flies provide a good example.

Bees are 'smart'. They are of course very social, have 'homes', and have excellent spatial awareness - they know just where they are in relation to that home. When a bee comes into the building, explores here and there, and then becomes trapped on the screen, unable to fly out into the open air, the sequence of events invariably follows the same pattern. He bangs and bangs repeatedly on the screen, trying desperately to head off in the direction of home. He knows where he wants to go, and no other direction is acceptable. If the opening in the screen is not on the correct 'bee-line', it will be of no help; the 'intelligent' strategy that previously served him very well has become useless, because his environment has changed.

It ends in tears, with a dead bee on the window sill.

Flies, on the other hand, seem to have a pretty 'dumb' strategy. As far as I understand, they have no home, no social life, and no particular awareness of where they are. They just buzz around, presumably in a search for something to eat, or some place to lay eggs, depending on the circumstance.

When a fly becomes trapped against my screen, the behaviour is quite different to that of the bee. The fly will buzz against the screen for a while, banging this way and that, and will then sit quietly for a while, now and then rubbing his 'hands' together. I would presume that he is re-charging the particular chemical devices in his body that provide power to his wings. When he is ready, he again buzzes up into the air, but unlike the bee, shows no inclination to fly in a particular direction, and just bangs around completely aimlessly.

His story too, may sometimes end in tragedy, but more often than not, it ends successfully. At some point in his random wandering, he stumbles across the escape route at the side of the window, and away he goes, out into the open air.

Now I'm not ready to jump to too many conclusions when taking a lesson from this little story. Should we say that the bee is 'too smart for his own good'? Well, I don't think so, although in this particular case, the 'mindless' strategy of the fly does seem to be useful.

I think I can perhaps glean something from *both* of these insects. For a number of years, I had a 'good strategy' for operating my printmaking business - holding large-scale annual exhibitions in an expensive gallery - and it worked very well. But bit by bit, almost without me noticing it, something in the environment changed, and the exhibitions became less successful. Two years ago, I finally realized that if I just kept repeatedly banging against the window, I would end up on my back, so I stopped holding them.

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Since then - for a couple of years - I have sat quietly. But that is no solution either, and it is time to 'do something'. I have no idea what my new strategy should be, but the fly is showing me something important: even when you're not sure what to do, and you're not sure which way to turn - you can't just sit still. You have to get up out of your chair and get moving.

I'm writing this one Saturday evening. Come Monday, I'll be jumping on a train and heading downtown, with a folio of my prints in my bag. Maybe, I'll just end up buzzing around ... we'll see!

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