

# Ants Counting Their Step

Curious Cat Science and Engineering Blog

### [Ants That Count!](#) [1]

Most ants get around by leaving smell trails on the forest floor that show other ants how to get home or to food. They squeeze the glands that cover their bodies; those glands release a scent, and the scents in combination create trails the other ants can follow.

That works in the forest, but it doesn't work in a desert. Deserts are sandy and when the wind blows, smells scatter.

...

It's already known that ants use celestial clues to establish the general direction home, but how do they know exactly the number of steps to take that will lead them right to the entrance of their nest?

Wolf and Whittlinger trained a bunch of ants to walk across a patch of desert to some food. When the ants began eating, the scientists trapped them and divided them into three groups. They left the first group alone. With the second group, they used superglue to attach pre-cut pig bristles to each of their six legs, essentially putting them on stilts.

...

The regular ants walked right to the nest and went inside. The ants on stilts walked right past the nest, stopped and looked around for their home...

I posted about this back in 2006: [Ants on Stilts for Science](#) [2], but the webcast by NPR is worth a new post.

Related: [E.O. Wilson: Lord of the Ants](#) [3] - [Huge Ant Nest](#) [4] - [posts showing the scientific method of learning in action](#) [5]

[SOURCE](#) [6]

**Source URL (retrieved on 08/04/2015 - 1:56pm):**

<http://www.ecnmag.com/news/2009/11/ants-counting-their-step>

### Links:

[1] <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=120587095>

[2] <http://engineering.curiouscatblog.net/2006/06/30/ants-on-stilts-for-science/>

[3] <http://engineering.curiouscatblog.net/2009/03/30/eo-wilson-lord-of-the-ants/>

[4] <http://engineering.curiouscatblog.net/2008/08/19/huge-ant-nest/>

[5] <http://engineering.curiouscatblog.net/tag/scientific-inquiry/>

[6] <http://engineering.curiouscatblog.net/2009/11/30/ants-counting-their-step/>

## **Ants Counting Their Step**

Published on Electronic Component News (<http://www.ecnmag.com>)

---