

**OR280**

*The importance of property and privatization in social insect evolution*

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Property is a neglected topic in biology, though examples include territories, domiciles and nest structures, food caching, mate guarding, and the resources and partners in mutualisms. Resources most worth privatizing are often high in value. To be useful to their owner in the future, they are typically durable and defensible. Resources are often privatized by force or threat of force, but privatization can also be achieved by hiding, by constructing barriers, and by carrying or incorporating the property. Property is a topic of particular interest to social insects for two reasons. First, the returns on savings and investments can accrue to relatives, including descendants. This makes it evolutionarily advantageous to build elaborate nests and stores, from the honey of bees to the fungus gardens of some ants and termites. Second, social groups are particularly good at privatization because they can divide tasks among members, so they can simultaneously guard property and forage, for example. These two advantages of privatization enhance the evolution of cooperation through kin selection and explain some of the most spectacular features of social insects.