

# Some bugs are model citizens, researchers find

BEES and ants have long been recognised as tireless workers, but new research today suggests they can also behave like selfless, model citizens.

A study has found that some bees and ants do operate in the best interests of the group to which they belong – creating a “superorganism” – and can even sacrifice their lives for its greater good.

Scientists at Edinburgh and Oxford universities found the same could not be said for other animal groupings, such as herds of bison or shoals of fish. In those instances, where individual animals appear to be a team,

they are actually putting their own interests first.

Andy Gardner, of Edinburgh University’s School of Biological Sciences, said theories about the existence of superorganisms – where many individuals work within a self-sustaining social unit for a common purpose – have been much maligned.

He said theories have been “overstretched”, for example by those who suggest that human beings act as part of one giant unit.

He said of his research: “On the one hand we’re saying the theory does have some place. On the other hand, we’re saying ‘Let’s be careful about how we use it.’”