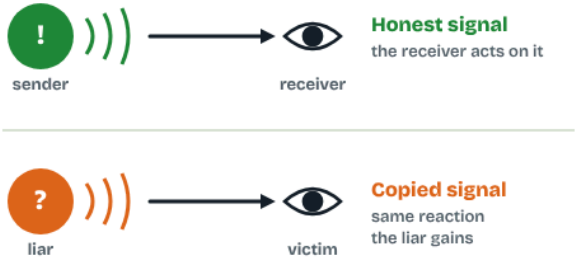
That is why

What kinds of lies do animals and plants tell?

Five tricks that fake a trusted signal, and why the victims keep falling for them.

A How a lie works



Five tricks fake a signal the victim trusts.

Why victims keep believing

The two mistakes do not cost the same:



Believe a fake alarm: lose a meal (a greylag goose: about 19 minutes of feeding).

Ignore a real alarm: far more likely to end in death.

Victims learn, so liars adapt.

B Fake food, fake love, fake danger

1 The fake meal (aggressive mimicry)



orchid mantis

Pollinator visits



about 30% more visits than real flowers

2 The fake love letter



Photuris

She flashes a female's reply to another species' males, then eats the males she lures.



12 males answered in half an hour

3 The borrowed disguise (Batesian)



wasp: stings = hoverfly: harmless

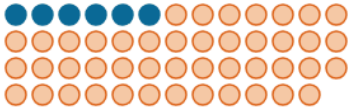
Same warning colors, no sting.

Chameleon vine copies nearby leaves: nobody knows how.

C Stolen food, a threat

4 The false alarm

Drongo: 51 alarm calls



its own (6) copied (45)

Stolen food:

about a quarter of its daily calories



5 The offer you can't refuse

Cuckoo mafia, Spain: magpie nests wrecked

Cuckoo egg removed



Cuckoo egg kept



A threat, not a lie.
Not found in Israel or Japan.

Signals work like money: liars print fake bills, and believing is usually the safer bet.

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