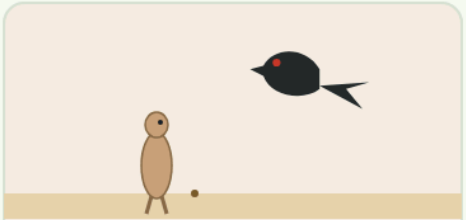
That is why

How does the drongo con other animals out of their food?

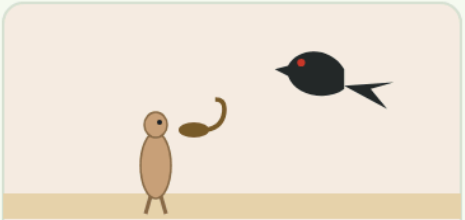
It fakes an alarm call so its victim drops its food, and when the trick wears off, it switches to a different call.

A The con, in four moves



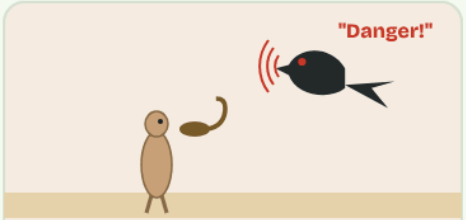
1 Tag along

It follows meerkats, catching insects their digging stirs up.



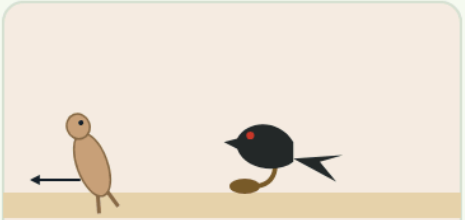
2 Wait for a prize

A meerkat digs up something big: a scorpion or fat larva.



3 Fake an alarm

No predator in sight, but the drongo gives an alarm call.

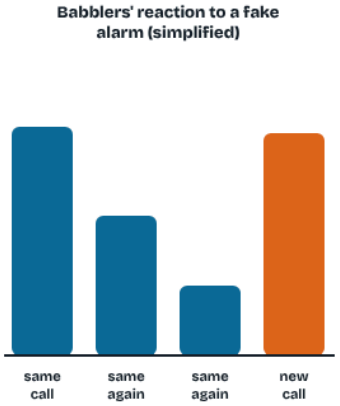


4 Steal

The meerkat drops its food and runs; the drongo swoops in.

Thefts like this supply about a quarter of a drongo's daily calories.

B Why it changes its voice



1 Switch after a flop

On repeat attempts, drongos changed calls about 3 times in 4, more often after a failure.

C The con in numbers

1 51 alarm calls

Only 6 are the drongo's own.

2 850+ hours

watching 64 wild drongos in the Kalahari.

3 688 thefts tried

Victims include meerkats and pied babblers.

Does it know it's lying?
Its discoverer thinks a simple rule explains it: keep a call that works, switch one that fails.

Cry wolf, and when they stop listening, cry like a different wolf.

Free for learning thatiswhy.com

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Diagram: https://thatiswhy.com/diagrams/why-drongo-fake-alarms/ · Full guide: https://thatiswhy.com/why-drongo-is-natures-con-artist/