

Reporting Summary

Nature Portfolio wishes to improve the reproducibility of the work that we publish. This form provides structure for consistency and transparency in reporting. For further information on Nature Portfolio policies, see our [Editorial Policies](#) and the [Editorial Policy Checklist](#).

Statistics

For all statistical analyses, confirm that the following items are present in the figure legend, table legend, main text, or Methods section.

n/a	Confirmed
☐	☒ The exact sample size (<i>n</i>) for each experimental group/condition, given as a discrete number and unit of measurement
☐	☒ A statement on whether measurements were taken from distinct samples or whether the same sample was measured repeatedly
☐	☒ The statistical test(s) used AND whether they are one- or two-sided <i>Only common tests should be described solely by name; describe more complex techniques in the Methods section.</i>
☒	☐ A description of all covariates tested
☐	☒ A description of any assumptions or corrections, such as tests of normality and adjustment for multiple comparisons
☐	☒ A full description of the statistical parameters including central tendency (e.g. means) or other basic estimates (e.g. regression coefficient) AND variation (e.g. standard deviation) or associated estimates of uncertainty (e.g. confidence intervals)
☐	☒ For null hypothesis testing, the test statistic (e.g. <i>F</i> , <i>t</i> , <i>r</i>) with confidence intervals, effect sizes, degrees of freedom and <i>P</i> value noted <i>Give P values as exact values whenever suitable.</i>
☒	☐ For Bayesian analysis, information on the choice of priors and Markov chain Monte Carlo settings
☒	☐ For hierarchical and complex designs, identification of the appropriate level for tests and full reporting of outcomes
☒	☐ Estimates of effect sizes (e.g. Cohen's <i>d</i> , Pearson's <i>r</i>), indicating how they were calculated

Our web collection on [statistics for biologists](#) contains articles on many of the points above.

Software and code

Policy information about [availability of computer code](#)

Data collection	Video recordings were performed using the open software iSPY (https://www.ispyconnect.com/).
Data analysis	To perform video analysis and count ants in the foraging trail, we developed a video tracking tool based on YOLOv5 (we named it "Formigometro"). This software is available on GitHub and the link is provided on the supplementary material. For the analysis of the leaf area, we used Fiji (https://imagej.net/software/fiji/).

For manuscripts utilizing custom algorithms or software that are central to the research but not yet described in published literature, software must be made available to editors and reviewers. We strongly encourage code deposition in a community repository (e.g. GitHub). See the Nature Portfolio [guidelines for submitting code & software](#) for further information.

Data

Policy information about [availability of data](#)

All manuscripts must include a [data availability statement](#). This statement should provide the following information, where applicable:

- Accession codes, unique identifiers, or web links for publicly available datasets
- A description of any restrictions on data availability
- For clinical datasets or third party data, please ensure that the statement adheres to our [policy](#)

All data, software and codes will be public available and referenced as supplementary materials. No clinical datasets or third party data were involved.

Research involving human participants, their data, or biological material

Policy information about studies with [human participants or human data](#). See also policy information about [sex, gender \(identity/presentation\), and sexual orientation](#) and [race, ethnicity and racism](#).

Reporting on sex and gender	Does not apply to this study.
Reporting on race, ethnicity, or other socially relevant groupings	Does not apply to this study.
Population characteristics	Does not apply to this study.
Recruitment	Does not apply to this study.
Ethics oversight	Does not apply to this study.

Note that full information on the approval of the study protocol must also be provided in the manuscript.

Field-specific reporting

Please select the one below that is the best fit for your research. If you are not sure, read the appropriate sections before making your selection.

☒ Life sciences ☐ Behavioural & social sciences ☐ Ecological, evolutionary & environmental sciences

For a reference copy of the document with all sections, see [nature.com/documents/nr-reporting-summary-flat.pdf](https://www.nature.com/documents/nr-reporting-summary-flat.pdf)

Life sciences study design

All studies must disclose on these points even when the disclosure is negative.

Sample size	No sample size was calculated as the experiment was only performed once. However, this study involves continuous recording of a leafcutter ant colony over several days and all analyses were performed using thousands of videos and pictures, which was sufficient for statistical analysis.
Data exclusions	The only data points excluded were negative leaf-area rates. These data points were an artifact of our feeding method and have no biological meaning but could bias or analysis, so they were excluded. This is stated in the manuscript.
Replication	This experiment was not replicated. Our analysis show that different variables and analyses recover consistently the claims made in the manuscript. All data and resources for replication are available for future studies.
Randomization	We randomized feeding events as leafcutter ants are particularly sensitive to fresh leaves. This is stated in the methods section.
Blinding	Does not apply to this study.

Reporting for specific materials, systems and methods

We require information from authors about some types of materials, experimental systems and methods used in many studies. Here, indicate whether each material, system or method listed is relevant to your study. If you are not sure if a list item applies to your research, read the appropriate section before selecting a response.

Materials & experimental systems

n/a	Involved in the study
☒	☐ Antibodies
☒	☐ Eukaryotic cell lines
☒	☐ Palaeontology and archaeology
☐	☒ Animals and other organisms
☒	☐ Clinical data
☒	☐ Dual use research of concern
☒	☐ Plants

Methods

n/a	Involved in the study
☒	☐ ChIP-seq
☒	☐ Flow cytometry
☒	☐ MRI-based neuroimaging

Animals and other research organisms

Policy information about [studies involving animals](#); [ARRIVE guidelines](#) recommended for reporting animal research, and [Sex and Gender in Research](#)

Laboratory animals

Atta sexdens ant colonies (older than 3 years).

Wild animals

This study did not involve field work.

Reporting on sex

All animals involved in this research were females (all worker ants are females).

Field-collected samples

This study did not involve samples collected from the field.

Ethics oversight

No ethical approval or guidance was required for this study as it involved only insects.

Note that full information on the approval of the study protocol must also be provided in the manuscript.

Plants

Seed stocks

Does not apply to this study.

Novel plant genotypes

Does not apply to this study.

Authentication

Does not apply to this study.