London, Oct 10: The importance of yeast in beer brewing has long been underestimated but researchers from University of Leuven in Belgium now report that beer yeasts produce chemicals that mimic the aroma of fruits in order to attract flies that can transport the yeast cells to new places.

Interestingly, yeasts are essential for the flavour of beverages such as beer and wine. “In fact, yeasts may even be responsible for much of the ‘terroir’, the connection between a particular growing area and wine flavour which
previously often was attributed to differences in the soil,” said Kevin Verstrepen from University of Leuven, also known as KU Leuven.

The new collaborative study from VIB, a life sciences research institute, and KU Leuven shows that the fruity volatiles produced by yeast cells are highly appealing to fruit flies. This attraction allows some yeast cells to hitch a ride with the insects who carry the otherwise immobile microbes to new food sources. Flies are strongly attracted to normal yeast cells when compared to mutant yeasts that do not produce esters.

"Knowing that esters make beer taste good, it seems that the same flavours that allow us to enjoy our beer probably evolved to attract flies and to help yeast disperse into broader ecosystems,” explained neuroscientist Emre Yaksi from Neuro-Electronics Research Flanders (http://www.india.com/topic/Neuro-Electronics%20Research%20Flanders.html) (NERF), an academic research initiative.

The team believes that their findings have far-reaching implications. "We all know that flowers attract insects by producing aromas. But there is also a lot of microbes living inside flowers and the chemicals they produce may also play an important role,” added Joaquin Christiaens from VIB who performed the experiments with yeast cells.

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