

Bees

What are bees?

Bees are flying insects closely related to wasps and ants. They are well known for making honey. They pollinate plants so they can grow. They are very important to the earth. There are many species of bees for example, bumblebee and Honey Bee.

Honey bee

The Honey bee is a well known bee all across the world. They are known for their ability to collect nectar from flowers and produce honey. Honey bees are mustard yellow and brown. They have stocky bodies that are covered with many hairs to which pollen sticks. The honey bee pollinates crops.



Where they live

The most commonly recognised honey bee species, *Apis mellifera*, is native to Africa and Europe. Honey bees are not native to America, but were introduced by European settlers. The first introductions are believed to have occurred in the early to mid 1600s by English and Spanish settlers.

What they eat

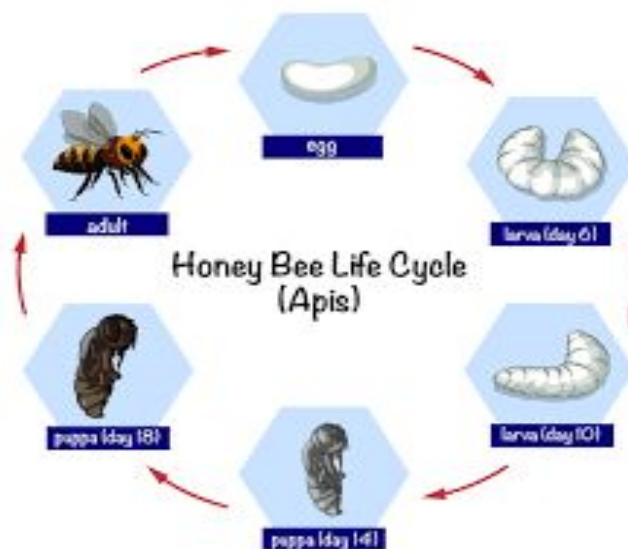
Honey bees harvest nectar and pollen from flowering plants. They are not attracted to meats like the wasps that show up at picnics.

Behaviour

Honey bees are social insects that live in large colonies. The queen bee, drones and worker bees all have specific tasks to help support the colony. The queen bee lays hundreds of eggs. The male drones' main function is to be ready to fertilize a receptive queen. Worker bees do all the different tasks needed to operate and maintain the hive.

Reproduction

The queen bee lays all the eggs in her colony. At the height of the season, she may lay over 2,500 eggs per day!



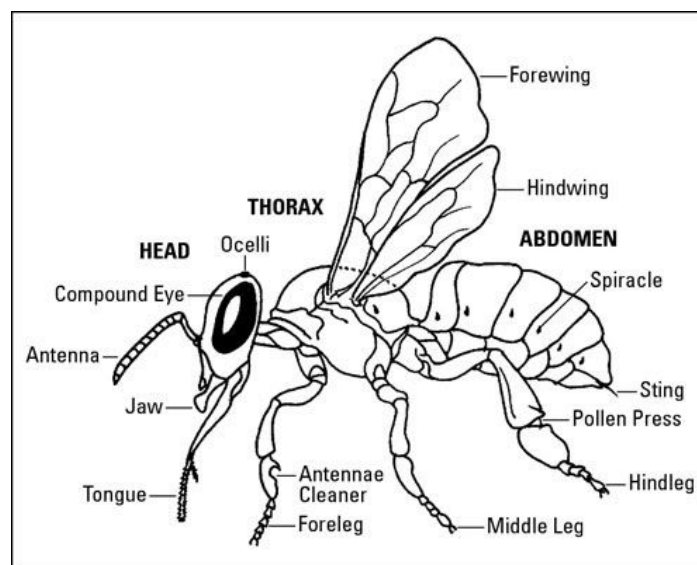
Why are bees so important to the world?

Bees are vitally important for everyone. Honey bees make honey by mixing nectar with enzymes and by fanning the mixture with their wings to help the water evaporate. They also make beeswax that we can use in cosmetics, candles and furnish polish.

Bees, including honey bees and bumblebees, pollinate over 250,000 species of plants and more than 100 different crops, including fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds and many of the food that ourselves and farm animals rely on. In all, they are responsible for pollinating around one-third of all the foods we eat. Without bees many plant crops would no longer exist, so no apples or strawberries to eat, no cotton t-shirts and a lot less food for farm animals.

What is pollination?

When bees crawl over flowers to collect nectar to eat, they get grains of pollen stuck all over their ferry bodies. When the bees fly to another flower, the pollen grains fall onto the stigma of the flower. This fertilises the plant so that it can make fruit and seeds for the next generation of plants. The bees use the nectar to make honey, so both they and the plant benefit together.



Bees Under Threat

Honey bees are in decline due to the varroa mite which infests the hives and sucks the blood out of the bees. They also pass viruses onto the bees. This can be treated by chemicals but this is often harmful to the bees as well and mostly there are removed from the hives by hygienic bees which remove dead pupae and larvae from the hives.

The other factors affecting bee populations are the use of insecticides in the environment, changing weather patterns and the removal of wildflowers and “plant corridors” in the countryside.

To encourage bees in my garden I have put up a bee hotel and planned a wildflower garden.



