



Honey Bees - Biology

Insect Identification Tips

All animals are classified according to how they look, how they behave, and how their bodies work in comparison with the bodies of other organisms. Honey bees are insects. All insects have six legs and three body sections. Insects usually have antennae and wings as well. Honey bees are often mistaken for other types of flying, stinging insects.

Honey bees are hairy insects that are brownish-orange and black. They have pollen baskets on their legs to carry pollen. They are social insects that feed on pollen and nectar. Honey bees are generally not aggressive and will only sting if feeling threatened.

Bumblebees are big, hairy, yellow and black, square-shaped bees. They live in nests in the ground and generally live in colonies of only a few hundred. The nest is a ball of dry grass and moss with a cushion of pollen in the middle. The queen makes a very small honey pot and fills it with nectar for use in bad weather. Bumblebee colonies last for just a few months, and all the bees except the new queen die at the end of the summer. All female bumblebees can sting more than once but are relatively unaggressive. Bumblebees do not use dances to “communicate” with others.

Carpenter bees are large and resemble bumblebees. Females are totally black and have shiny upper abdomens. Males are blonde or tan-colored and lack stingers.

Carpenter bees have powerful jaw muscles and strong mandibles that they use to bore tunnels into dead trees or wooden buildings where they live. They are solitary insects and are unlikely to sting unless handled.

Leafcutter bees live alone, not in groups, and therefore are known as solitary bees. They cut off pieces of leaf and roll them up to make their cells. Leafcutters make their nests in hollow twigs or in other openings about the diameter of a pencil.

Sweat bees are solitary bees and are metallic blue or green. They often nest in the soil where the females lay their eggs on pollen balls. Sweat bees are known for licking sweat from people and animals.

Paper wasps are brightly colored black and yellow and are smooth and somewhat shiny. They have two sets of dusky-colored wings, narrow cylindrical legs and no pollen baskets. Paper wasps build their nests out of paper made from plant fiber or wood and like to put them in a hollow tree, in the ground or under the eaves of a house. They are predators and eat insects and spiders. Female paper wasps are aggressive and can sting repeatedly.

Yellowjackets are a type of short, stocky wasp. They have a cross-banded black and yellow abdomen. The head and thorax are black with yellow spots. Their broad abdomen tapers off to a sharp point where the stinger is concealed. Female yellowjackets can sting repeatedly and are quick to attack when disturbed. They nest in weedy brush areas on the ground or underground in an old animal burrow or crevice.

Notes:
