

Honey Bee

(Apis mellifera)



DID YOU KNOW

The honeybee is not native to North America. It was brought here by European settlers. Honeybees are social creatures, dependent upon the success of the colony for their own survival. Each bee at different life stages performs a job that is necessary for the survival of the entire colony.

EATING HABITS:

Adult honeybees eat pollen and nectar. They feed their young pollen, nectar, honey and royal jelly, which is produced in the bee's head gland. A queen bee is fed only royal jelly.

THE YOUNG:

Honeybee eggs are laid by the queen bee. (Because she is the largest bee in the colony, the ancients thought this was the King Bee.) She can produce 1,200 eggs per day and may lay 200,000 eggs during the honey season. Worker bees (sterile females) feed the young in their larval state. When the larva is big enough to fill the honeycomb wax cell, the adult worker bee caps the cell over with wax. The larva bee sheds its skin within the wax cell. Then the pupa changes into an adult bee, emerges from the cell and starts the cycle again.



HABITAT (HOME):

Honeybees prefer to build honeycombs in hollow logs and other enclosed areas, such as constructed beehives. The honeybees must have a food source - flowering plants - within eight miles of their hive, but closer is better.

DEFENSIVE HABITS:

Honeybees will usually sting in defense of their hive. They are not likely to sting when collecting food if they are not bothered. Worker bees die when they use their stinger, so it is a last resort effort to protect the hive from predators.

UNUSUAL FACTS:

- When the colony is too large for the hive, the bees will hatch a new queen. When she is old enough, she will leave the hive with about half the worker bees, form a swarm and locate a new place to nest. Beekeepers often capture 'wild' honeybees at this time.
- Bees are descended from wasps, most of which are carnivores. With the occurrence of flowering plants, many millions of years ago, some wasps made the switch from hunting prey to gathering pollen for their brood.
- Worker honeybees live only about 6 weeks. They work so hard to gather nectar and pollen that they have a very short life span.
- Although honeybees are not native to North America, there are many species of native bees that are vital for pollinating crops.

