

## Frequently Asked Questions: Honey Bees

Bees are beneficial insects – essential to ensure that crops are pollinated and produce the food we need. .

This leaflet attempts to answer ten common questions about the Honey Bee – its based on information provided by the British Beekeepers Association [www.bbka.org.uk](http://www.bbka.org.uk).

### 1. WHAT DO I DO IF I GET STUNG ?

Bees will not generally sting if unprovoked, usually the bee has been trapped in hair or crushed. A bee only stings under two conditions – either to protect the colony, or when frightened.

When close to a beehive avoid flapping your arms and moving rapidly, if the bees are antagonised walk away through undergrowth or trees if possible. When a bee stings, barbs in the lance of the sting cause it to torn from the bee as the bee is shaken off. You should scrape the bee sting out with your fingernail as the sting still pumps venom for some time after the bee has left. Having stung the bee will die.

Although sometimes painful stings are rarely dangerous and need only some antihistamine or local anesthetic cream from your pharmacist . Ask your pharmacist or call **NHS 111** for further advice or see <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/bites-and-stings/Pages/insects-bugs-that-bite-sting.aspx> A small number of people are strongly allergic to stings and can become very ill. If there is any shortness of breath, dial 999.

### 2. WHAT DO I DO IF I SEE A SWARM OF BEES ?

Don't Panic, bees in a swarm are universally in a good mood. They cannot easily sting even if antagonized as they have gorged themselves with honey and cannot get their bodies into the best position to sting. **If the swarm is not causing a nuisance then leave it**, gradually the bees will cluster in a bush or tree and remain there for up to 3 days. During that time scouts will be sent out to look for a new home.

The only problem may be they will choose your chimney. If, as the bees begin to settle, you put your fire/ heating on low this often persuades them to move on.

**If the swarm is a nuisance then the contact the Pest Control team call 01782 742590**

### 3. HOW DO BEEKEEPERS CATCH A SWARM ?

A swarm is actively looking for a home, so if the beekeeper puts a transfer box with perhaps some old honey comb in it close to where the swarm has settled, then it is easy to persuade them to take up residence.

Bees already in residence perhaps in a chimney or old tree must be removed with their honeycomb containing the young grubs and the queen. If the bees cannot be reached then the beekeeper is helpless and the council pest control will destroy the colony.

*For safety reasons it is essential that a chimney sweep, or gas engineer inspects the flue after the bees have been removed to ensure that it is free from blockages. Partially blocked chimneys and gas flues can kill, as deadly carbon monoxide cannot correctly escape from the heating appliance.*

### 4. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HONEY BEES, WASPS AND BUMBLE BEES ?

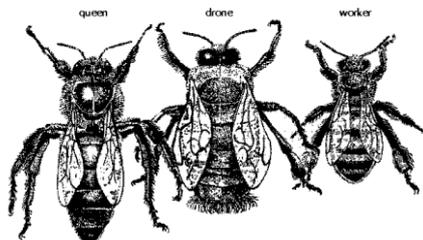
**Honey Bees** live in a well-organized colony. They do not hibernate. They produce honey and store it in wax comb and use the same hive from one year to the next. They pollinate crops. They do not sting unless threatened and can sting only once. Having stung they die. Size 16-20mm



**Wasps** start in the spring with a single queen wasp that has hibernated under leaves or in cracks. The queen wasp builds a new hive constructed from paper and about the size of a golf ball. This hive (bice) builds up through the summer, however no honey is stored. In the autumn the colony organisation breaks down, with homeless wasps becoming an increasing nuisance around bins and rubbish. They can sting several times. Size 13-19mm

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**Bumble Bees** like wasps only the queen hibernates and survives the winter. In the spring the queen bumblebee seeks an old mouse or vole hole and builds within it a nest of leaves and moss. She constructs nodular wax cells and incubates her young as a bird would. As her first offspring hatch and begin to fly the queen increasingly stays within the hive to produce young. Bumblebees do make a small amount of honey and store it in one special cup like cell. There is no more than a tablespoon at any time. Size 20-24mm



**5. HOW MANY TYPES OF BEES ARE IN A HONEY BEE COLONY ?**

There are three types of bees in a honeybee colony: a single queen; thousands of workers (females); and in the summer hundreds of drones (males). In the early autumn the male drone bees are evicted by the workers and die.

**6. WHAT DOES THE QUEEN BEE DO ?**

The major purpose of the queen is to lay eggs. She does not rule the colony and has a smaller brain than a worker bee. A healthy queen bee emits a pheromone (a bee perfume). This odour tells the bees in the colony that the queen is still with them and all is well in the hive. During April and May she lays day and night, each egg taking about 20 seconds. That's over 2000 eggs a day, more than the body weight of the queen.

The queen mates only once and holds sufficient sperm from the male drones to lay eggs for 3-5 years, incidentally the drone bee dies in the process.

There are 3 types of wax cell used for eggs. In the smallest cells (5mm diameter) she lays fertilised eggs which in 21 days produce the female worker bees. In larger cells (7mm diameter) unfertilised eggs are laid which in 24 days become the male drone bees. A very special cell which hangs vertically downwards is used to produce new queens. The making of a queen is triggered usually by a combination of conditions such as congestion in the hive and lack of egg laying space, this culminates in a swarm.

**7. HOW LONG DOES A BEE LIVE ?**

In the summer a worker bee only lives for about 40 days. As no young are raised over the winter months, the workers born in the autumn will live until the following spring. Bees do not hibernate, they over winter as a strong colony clustered together and using their bodies to generate heat. This cluster is about the size of football, the bees taking turns to be on the cold outside. A queen can live up to 5 years.

**8. HOW DO THE BEES SHARE OUT ALL THE DIFFERENT JOBS IN A HIVE ?**

When a bee is born it's first job is to clean out the cell in which she was born. Jobs are then allocated on the basis of age.

<b>Days Old</b>	<b>Duties of Worker Bees</b>
1-2	Cleans cells and keeps the brood warm
3-5	Feeds older larvae
6-11	Feeds youngest larvae
12-17	Produces wax, Builds comb, Carries food. Undertaker duties
18-21	Guards the hive entrance
22-on	Flying from hive begins, Pollinates plants, Collects pollen, nectar and water.

**9. HOW MANY BEES ARE IN A BEE HIVE ?**

In high summer about 40,000 live in a hive, dropping to around 5,000 in the winter.

**10. HOW FAR CAN BEES FLY ?**

It is possible for bees to fly as far as 5 miles for food, however an average distance would be less than a mile from the hive. A strong colony flies the equivalent distance of to the moon every day!.

Based upon Frequently Asked Questions by: Graham & Annie Law.  
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