

Busy, Busy Bees

Did you know that bees have a complicated way of communicating with each other?

¹ Think of the last time you saw a bee. Perhaps it was busily gathering nectar from a flower in your garden. Maybe it was flying around a sweet drink you had at a picnic. Did you ever think about where that bee might live and what it does once it flies away? Chances are it lives a more interesting and complex life than you ever suspected.

² Today, the honey bee can be found on every continent except Antarctica. It can survive only as a member of a colony, where each bee plays a very specific role. In each honey bee colony, there are three types of bees: the queen bee, the worker bees, and the drones.



³ The queen is different from the rest of the bees in a colony in several ways. She is the only bee in the colony to reproduce, so she is the mother of all the other bees in the colony. She can lay an enormous number of eggs —as many as 1,500 every day! The weight of all those eggs is about the same as the queen's entire body.

⁴ The queen bee has a smooth, curved stinger instead of a straight, barbed, or spiky stinger like the worker bees. Worker bees die after stinging, because they cannot remove their barbed stingers. The queen bee can sting repeatedly without injuring herself.

⁵ Another difference between queen and worker bees is that a queen bee can live for one to three years, while a worker bee lives only an average of six weeks.

⁶ A colony of honey bees is mostly made up of worker bees. A single colony may contain as many as 80,000 worker bees. They are called worker bees for a very good reason. Their job is to build and maintain the nest, gather nectar and pollen to make honey, and care for the young bees. If the hive becomes too warm for the eggs and young bees, the worker bees fan their wings to make it cooler. When the hive becomes too cool, they huddle around the eggs and young bees to warm them.

⁷ The third type of honey bee is called a drone. The drones are the male bees. They do not have stingers or tools for working. They cannot even feed themselves. Their only purpose is to mate with the queen bee to produce new worker bees.

⁸ One of the most fascinating things about honey bees is their way of communicating. Bees are able to tell each other where to find food by doing complicated "dances." These dances can tell bees how far away food can be found and in which direction it is located. The moves they make are so clear that scientists who have studied bee communication can actually watch a dance and follow a bee's directions.

Write the words from the passage that have the meanings below.

1. hard to understand

Par. 1

2. over and over again

Par. 4

3. a group of animals that live together

Par. 6

4. to crowd closely together

Par. 6

5. very interesting and appealing

Par. 8

Read the descriptions below. Write **Q** next to the phrase if it describes queen bees. Write **W** if it describes worker bees.

6. _____ dies after stinging

7. _____ builds the nest

8. _____ has a smooth, curved stinger

9. _____ lays more than a thousand eggs a day

10. _____ cools eggs by fanning their wings

11. What is one place in the world where honey bees cannot be found?

12. How long can a queen bee live?

13. The only purpose of a drone is to _____.

14. How does the author feel about the way bees communicate?
