

# Bees



Bees are descended from a wasp species that started to eat pollen instead of insect prey. The oldest known bee is over 100 million years old, preserved as a fossil in amber. Scientists have so far discovered 17000 different species of bee.

Bees can fly at 25kph and beat their wings 200 times a second!

Honey bees and Bumble bees work together in colonies in which one female, the queen, specialises in laying eggs, and others are workers. Work involves building nests and collecting food for the larvae. Male bees do not participate in this work.

An average size bee colony can house up to 50000 bees!

## Did You Know?

- \* Britain has over 250 bee species, 5 times as many as our butterfly species.
- \* Some bees are cuckoos. Females lay their eggs in the nests of other bee species.
- \* Only female bees sting. This is because the sting is a modified egg-laying device.
- \* Insects are 400 million years old. At only 100 million years, the bees are quite a recent type of insect. Dinosaurs lived from 230 to 65 million years ago.
- \* Bees have colour vision as do humans but the colours bees see are different. Bees cannot see red but can see ultra violet. Many flowers have ultra violet markings.

## How Amazing!

- \* Some bumble bees cheat plants by cutting a hole in the flower and inserting their tongue through the hole to "rob" the nectar without pollinating the flower.
- \* Some eusocial bees living in Africa and tropical America have given up collecting food from flowers. Instead they raid the colonies of other bees to steal their food stores.
- \* Honey bees communicate with each other using dances and pheromones to forage more efficiently and to help coordinate the colony and the work that needs doing.

Bees have important relationships with plants, and are the most important pollinating animals. While some plants can self-pollinate most need pollen to be carried to another plant to set seed. Flowers are colourful to attract bees and other insects and provide nectar as a reward or incentive.