

Insect Fact Sheet

The Honey Bee



Honey Bees are social insects, living in colonies containing thousands of worker bees, with just one queen. But the Honey Bee has declined in recent years, with the UK population now down by as much as 50% and still decreasing.

The Honey Bee's decline has seen many old long established, wild nests disappear, but the decline has also affected colonies kept by beekeepers in hives. Wild nests are usually found in hollow trees and when the colony outgrows the tree cavity, they up and leave to find a more suitable site to relocate to.

They fly as a swarm and will sometimes land and make temporary camp anywhere, until the workers find a new nest site. Once a site is chosen, then the business of comb construction begins within the new nest.

With such large numbers of bees living together in a colony, communication between the bees is important. It is well known that worker honeybees perform 'dances' to other workers, telling them of the location of a suitable nectar source. It is believed that during these dances, the bees communicate the distance and direction of the food source to other workers.

Any successful colony containing large numbers of adults needs a certain order. Insects such as ants, bees and wasps, all have workers that have different roles in maintaining the successful day to day running of the colony. Typical worker roles include cleaners, nurserymaids, foragers and guards to protect the nest entrance.

Male Honey Bees play no role within the colony, other than to mate with young queens. After mating, the males are thrown out by the workers and soon die. But at the heart of any colony, is the queen. She is the mother to all the workers within the nest, spending her days laying more eggs which will eventually become new workers and keep the colony going.

