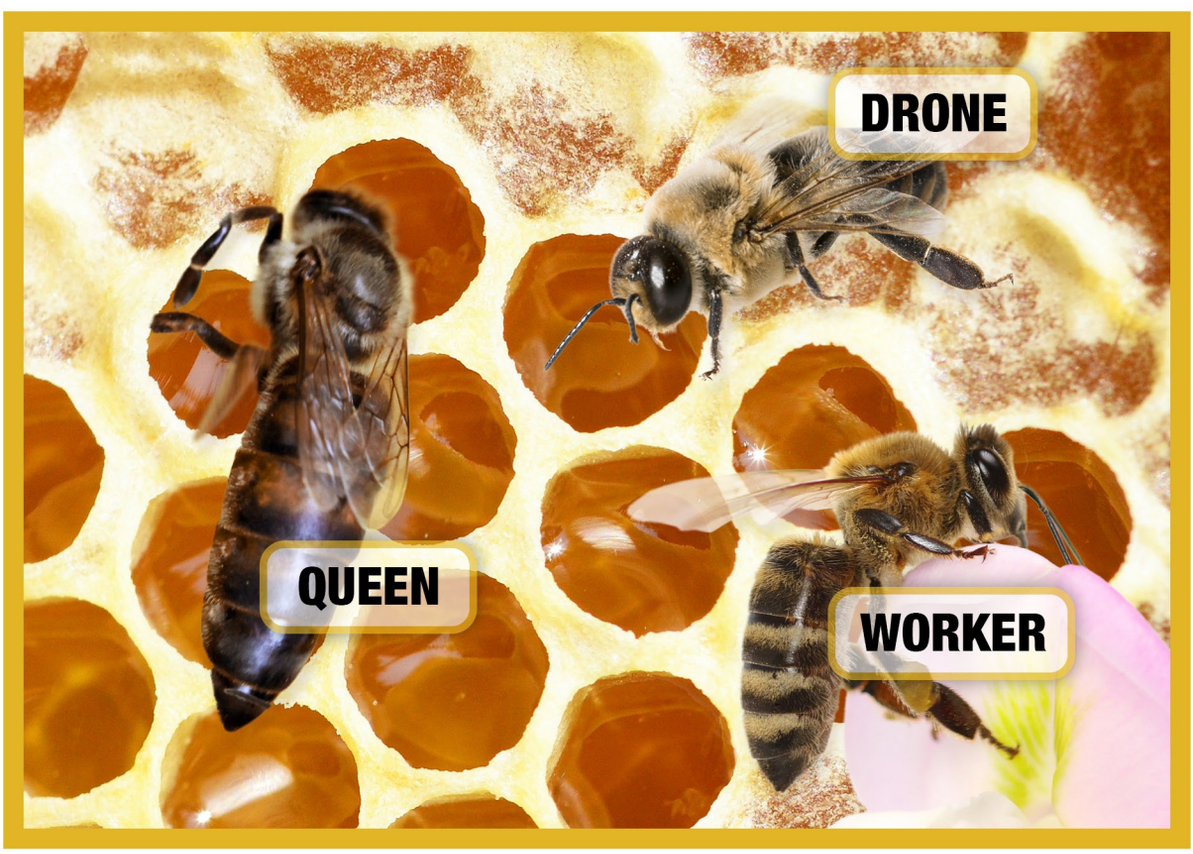
Bees Honeybees: Who's who?

Honeybees are the only type of bees that can make honey and there are only 7 species of honeybee in the world! The most common honeybee is the European honeybee (Apis mellifera) which, despite its name, is found in every continent in the world except Antarctica.

Honeybees live in social groups in nests or in special man-made beehives managed by beekeepers. There are 20,000 to 60,000 honeybees in each honeybee colony. Most of these bees are female worker bees or male drones but there is also a special queen bee who is the mother and ruler of them all!

Let's find out who lives in a bee colony and what they do.



THE QUEEN BEE

There can only be one queen in a bee colony and she is the mother of all the other bees! The queen is the only bee which can lay eggs - she lays up to 2,000 of these a day inside the honeycomb. These eggs become larvae, then pupae, then eventually become worker bees and drones. Queens usually live for between 2-4 years but can live for up to 7. If the colony decides their queen is too old or not a very good ruler, they create a new queen by giving a royal feast to one of the larva. All larvae are fed royal jelly for the first few days, but thereafter given a mix of pollen and honey. The new queen larva is fed royal jelly until she is fully grown.

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WORKER BEE

Worker bees are female and live for 4-8 weeks, depending on the time of year. Each honeybee colony can contain as many as 30,000-60,000 worker bees! Worker bees do all of the work for the hive. They visit flowers to collect pollen and nectar, make waxy honeycomb, and feed the larvae, queen and drones. Worker bees are the smallest type of bee in the hive.

DRONE

Drones are male bees and can live for up to 8 weeks. There are usually between 300-1,000 drones in a honeybee colony. Drones do not do any work but they can mate with the queen bee and fertilise her eggs. Unfertilised eggs develop into new drones while fertilised eggs become worker bees and – occasionally – new queens. Although they do no 'work' drones play a very important role in the survival of the colony because they provide 'genetic diversity'. This means that because the queen mates with lots of different drones from different bee colonies all of her offspring will be different. There's then less chance of the whole colony being killed by a disease or virus because the bees all have different disease-fighting genes.

QUIZ: WHICH HONEYBEE AM I?

Can you match the honeybees with the statements? Use the text about queen bees, worker bees and drones to help you.

1. I'm the only one of my kind in my bee colony. Who am I?

- ○ queen bee
- ○ worker bee
- ○ drone

2. There can be as many as 60,000 of my kind in a bee colony. Who am I?

- ○ queen bee
- ○ worker bee
- ○ drone

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3. I can fertilise eggs. Who am I?

- queen bee
- worker bee
- drone

4. I make waxy honeycomb inside the nest. Who am I?

- queen bee
- worker bee
- drone

5. When I'm bad at my job my colony replaces me. Who am I?

- queen bee
- worker bee
- drone

6. I visit flowers to collect pollen and nectar. Who am I?

- queen bee
- worker bee
- drone

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7. I'm the smallest bee in my colony. Who am I?

- queen bee
- worker bee
- drone

8. I can live for up to 7 years. Who am I?

- queen bee
- worker bee
- drone

9. I help my colony to survive disease. Who am I?

- queen bee
- worker bee
- drone

10. I feed the larvae with pollen and honey. Who am I?

- queen bee
- worker bee
- drone

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Honeybees: Who's who? ANSWERS

1. queen bee
2. worker bee
3. drone
4. worker bee
5. queen bee
6. worker bee
7. worker bee
8. queen bee
9. drone
10. worker bee

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