

## THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF WASPS

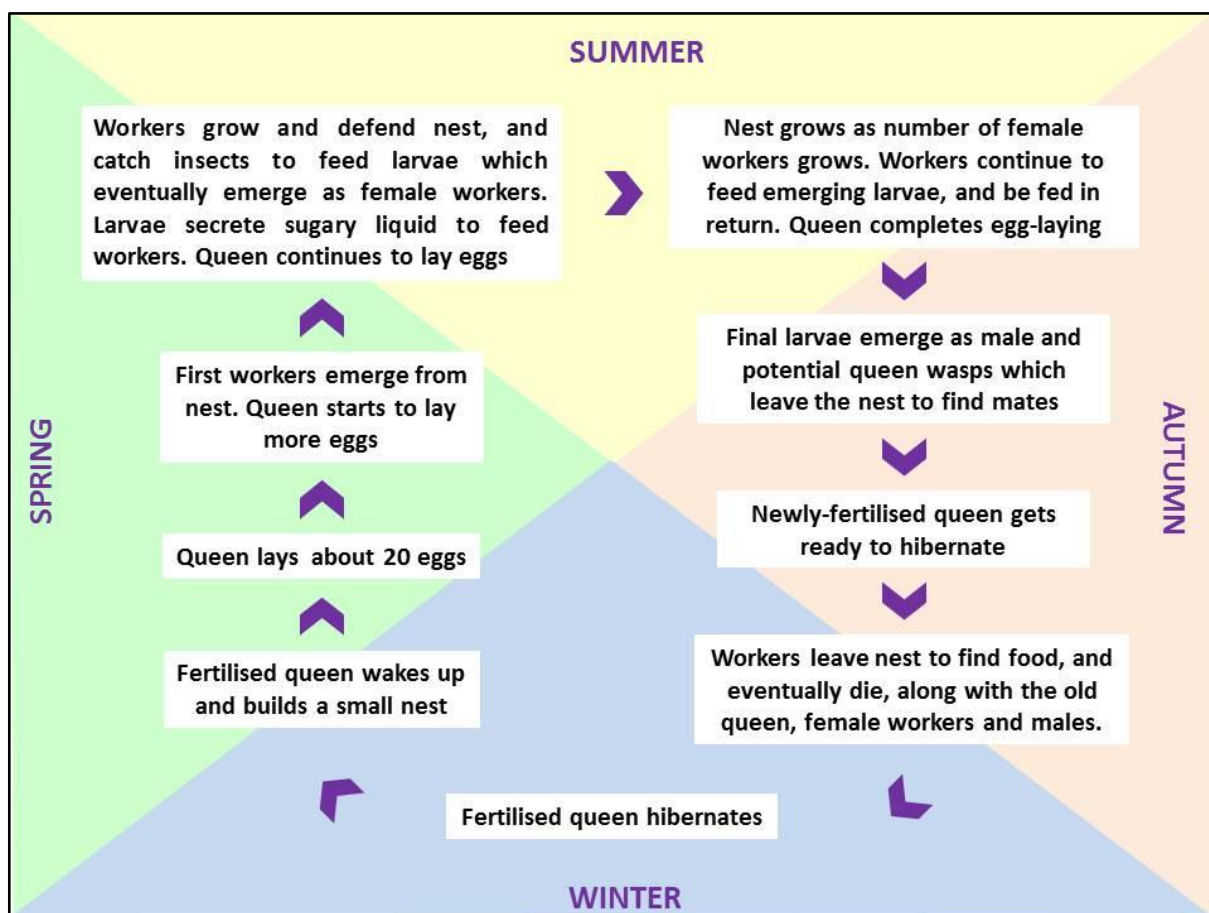
There are over 3,000 species of wasps in the UK, some as small as a pin head. Almost all of these are SOLITARY WASPS and ***cause people no harm at all.***



Most of the wasps we come across are SOCIAL WASPS, which live together in large nest-building colonies, with many worker wasps serving a single queen.

Social wasps belong to the *Vespidae* family, which has 33 species, of which we are probably most familiar with two: the Common Wasp (*Vespula vulgaris*) and the German Wasp (*Vespula germanica*) pictured left, both of which we see from spring through to autumn.

## THE LIFE CYCLE OF SOCIAL WASPS



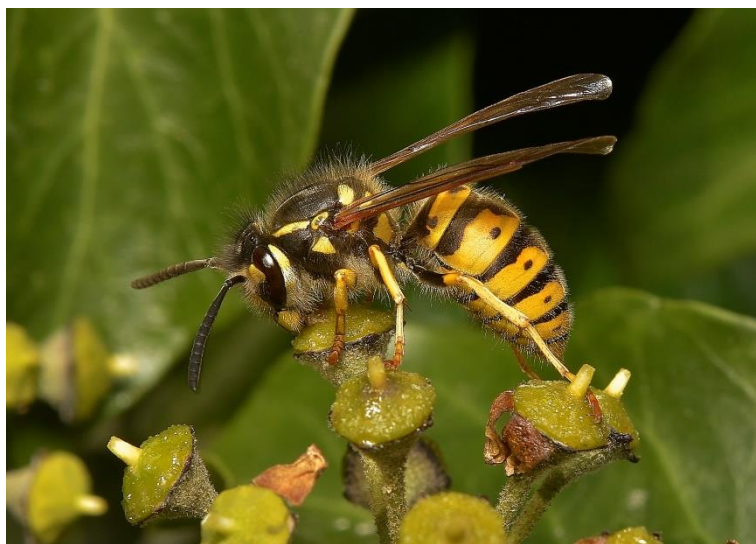
## **DID YOU KNOW?**

- A Social Wasp nest is made of wood fibres collected by the wasps, mixed with saliva to make a kind of papier-mache structure that is strong and durable. The wasp on the right is excavating wood from a fence post.
- A single nest can contain up to 10,000 wasps. The vast majority of these will be female workers; only a few males and female potential queens are produced, and only fertilised queens survive over winter.
- Worker wasps catch insects to feed the larvae, but are not meat eaters themselves. They rely, for food, on a sticky, sugary liquid produced by the larvae (as a reward for being looked after, perhaps?).
- Wasps are very beneficial. They eat around 14,000 tonnes of insects a year, which would otherwise damage plants and crops. Just like bees, they are extremely effective pollinators.



## **WASPS AND US**

When all of the larvae hatch and leave the nest, at the end of summer, the worker wasps have only themselves to look after, so they fly around looking for sugary liquids to eat. If you flap at or swat a wasp, it feels threatened and will defend itself. It also triggers an inbuilt mechanism designed to defend the nest and releases a pheromone that tells its worker mates that the nest is being attacked, and they – quite naturally – fly in to help protect it.



**So, instead of flapping or swatting wasps, let them be. Better still, leave out a pot of sugary liquid to attract them. After the summer they've had, they deserve it!**