

British Nature Guide

A look at evolution - Wasps, Honey Bees and Hoverflies

Wasps and Honey Bees can sting. Wasps have yellow and black stripes to warn predators that they are dangerous. Honey Bees are the same size as wasps but have orange and black stripes. Wasps and Honey Bees buzz loudly as they fly. Birds and mammals have learned it is best to keep away from them and not try to eat them.



Wasps and Honey Bee.



Hoverflies mimicking Wasps and Honey Bee.

As you can see the three Hoverflies look very similar to the Wasps and Honey Bee in the pictures above them. Hoverflies do not sting, but they have evolved to look like Wasps and Honey Bees. Because they look just like insects that will sting, predators leave them alone as well.

There is no need to be scared of Honey Bees and Wasps, but don't try to catch them or they might sting you. All of these insects do a very important job. They pollinate the flowers in our parks and gardens and the crops in the fields. Honey Bees also produce the honey that we eat.

Evolution

All living things evolve. This means that they change gradually to help them to survive. Hoverflies might once have been just yellow in colour. Predators would not have been worried about being stung and they would have eaten them. One or two Hoverflies might have hatched with black stripes and because of that they would not have been eaten. Gradually over several generations the yellow Hoverflies would have died out and only the ones with the black stripes would have been left.