

# IVY BEES - INFORMATION

Ivy Bees (*Colletes hederæ*) are nesting in this bank.

Ivy Bees are solitary bees which can form very large nesting aggregations. They are extremely attractive, with buff yellow and black banded abdomens and an orangey brown furry thorax. Females are almost as big as honeybees with the males being a bit smaller. Male bees do not have a sting and are completely harmless. The females are equipped with a sting but they have only rarely been known to use it on a person and it would require a lot of provoking for one to do so.



Female Ivy Bee on Ivy flower.



Ivy Bee 'mating ball'.

The bees first nested in this bank in 2018 when 30 nest holes were present. In subsequent years the number of nesting bees has increased dramatically. The adult bees are only present from September through to the end of October or early November.

Male bees emerge about two weeks before females at the beginning of September when scores of them can be seen flying low over the ground with an audible hum much like honeybees around a hive. They are waiting for the first females to emerge and the opportunity to mate.

When a fresh female emerges, she will be beset by male bees all trying to mate with her and you may see a 'mating ball', a cluster of male bees around a single female. When a male succeeds in getting a female they often fly off together in tandem, leaving the rest of the cluster of males to seek another female.

Once mated, each female will dig out a nest tunnel up to 30cms deep with side chambers. She provisions each chamber with pollen and nectar and then lays a single egg in each one. The females gather pollen exclusively from Ivy flowers but will take nectar from other flowers as well. Female bees can be seen foraging on Ivy flowers in the Cemetery or returning to their nest tunnels with bright yellow Ivy pollen on their hind legs.

The egg hatches into a maggot-like larva which proceeds to consume the store of protein-rich pollen and nectar laid down by the female bee (male bees do not contribute to nest building or provisioning). As it grows, it sheds its skin several times, much like a caterpillar. It eventually turns into a pupa and then undergoes metamorphosis, becoming a bee (again, much like a caterpillar turns into a butterfly or moth). The new bee will emerge from the nest tunnel the following September and the cycle starts all over again.

For more information see

[https://www.bwars.com/sites/www.bwars.com/files/info\\_sheets/01\\_Colletes\\_hederæ\\_20100908.pdf](https://www.bwars.com/sites/www.bwars.com/files/info_sheets/01_Colletes_hederæ_20100908.pdf).

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