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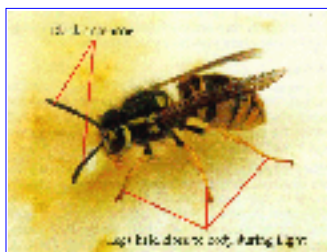


Figure 1. European wasp.



Figure 2. Diagram of European wasp nest.



Figure 3. Nest of European wasp with part of the outer covering removed.

Farmnote

European wasps

By Peter R. Davis, Entomologist, South Perth

European wasps are an exotic pest established in the eastern States but not yet established in W.A. Every year hundreds or even thousands of fertilised European wasp queens are accidentally transported into W.A. in freight, boxes and containers of merchandise. Most of these queen wasps die before they can make a nest but every year some nests are produced.

European wasps are stout-bodied and bee-shaped, only slightly larger than a normal bee and are brightly coloured with alternating bright lemon-yellow and black stripes with yellow legs and with the antennae (feelers) on the head, entirely black.

European wasps fly swiftly with [all their legs tucked up close to the body](#).

[European wasp nests](#) always have an outer covering and are shaped like a soccer ball but usually larger. [Nests are normally underground with a single entry hole](#) approximately 40mm (1 1/2 inches) in diameter. Occasionally nests are located in wall cavities, roof voids and hollow tree trunks.

European wasp nests typically contain 2,000 or more worker wasps.

What to look for:

- European wasps are brightly coloured yellow and black - there are no other colours.
- They are quite squat in appearance, much like a bee, but slightly larger than a bee. They also fly like bees with their legs held up close to their bodies.
- The antennae (feelers) on their heads are entirely black.
- The nests are concealed and are usually underground, in a hollow tree or in a roof or wall cavity in a house.
- The multiple honey-comb layers of the nests are covered



Figure 4. European wasps feed on meat and fish.

- by an outer layer of papery material. Typically, the nests are the size and shape of a basketball or bigger.
- Wasps are usually most noticeable near the entrance of their nests where streams of wasps may be seen entering and leaving an entrance hole (at least the size of a 50 cent piece if the nest is underground) - especially on warm days.
- [European wasps are unusual as they feed on meat products.](#)

Any sightings of black and yellow wasps settling on pet foods, fish or other meat products should be regarded as particularly suspicious and reported immediately.

Why European wasps are pests:

- European wasps attack bees and bee hives, robbing the hives of honey and sometimes completely killing hives.
- They also directly damage soft fruits and can cause substantial damage to grape crops.
- European wasps have even been reported cutting pieces of flesh from cows' teats.
- Environmentally, they are damaging through direct predation on native insects and competition with other species including birds.
- Tourism is adversely affected in areas where they are plentiful because wasps are attracted to foods, drinks and BBQ's in outdoor areas.
- They can be a significant urban pest and the cost of having a nest destroyed by professional pest control operators is expensive -costs range from \$50 -\$350/nest in the Eastern States.
- European wasps can sting several times in an attack and stung victims can require medical attention. Fatalities have been caused by reactions in allergic patients and by multiple wasp attacks where nests have been disturbed.

Biology:

In spring, lone mated European wasp queens search for a nest site and commence construction of a nest. The nest is made from

papery material scraped from wooden objects and mixed with saliva. The queen constructs about a dozen cells and lays an egg into each cell. When the eggs hatch into larvae she captures insects to feed the larvae until they pupate and eventually emerge as worker wasps in late spring or early summer. Once a worker population is available to gather wood for nest construction and food for the queen and larvae, the queen is freed to concentrate on laying eggs and she remains in the nest.

The nest grows in size and numbers of wasps over summer and reaches a peak in early autumn. Male wasps (drones) are then produced followed by new queens in late autumn. The new queens and drones mate and the nests usually decline and finally die out during winter. However, the mild winters in the southern Australia are not be sufficiently severe and nests can survive over winter. These overwintering nests may retain many new queens and, given the head start of not having to establish a new nest, can grow to huge sizes containing tens of thousands of wasps.

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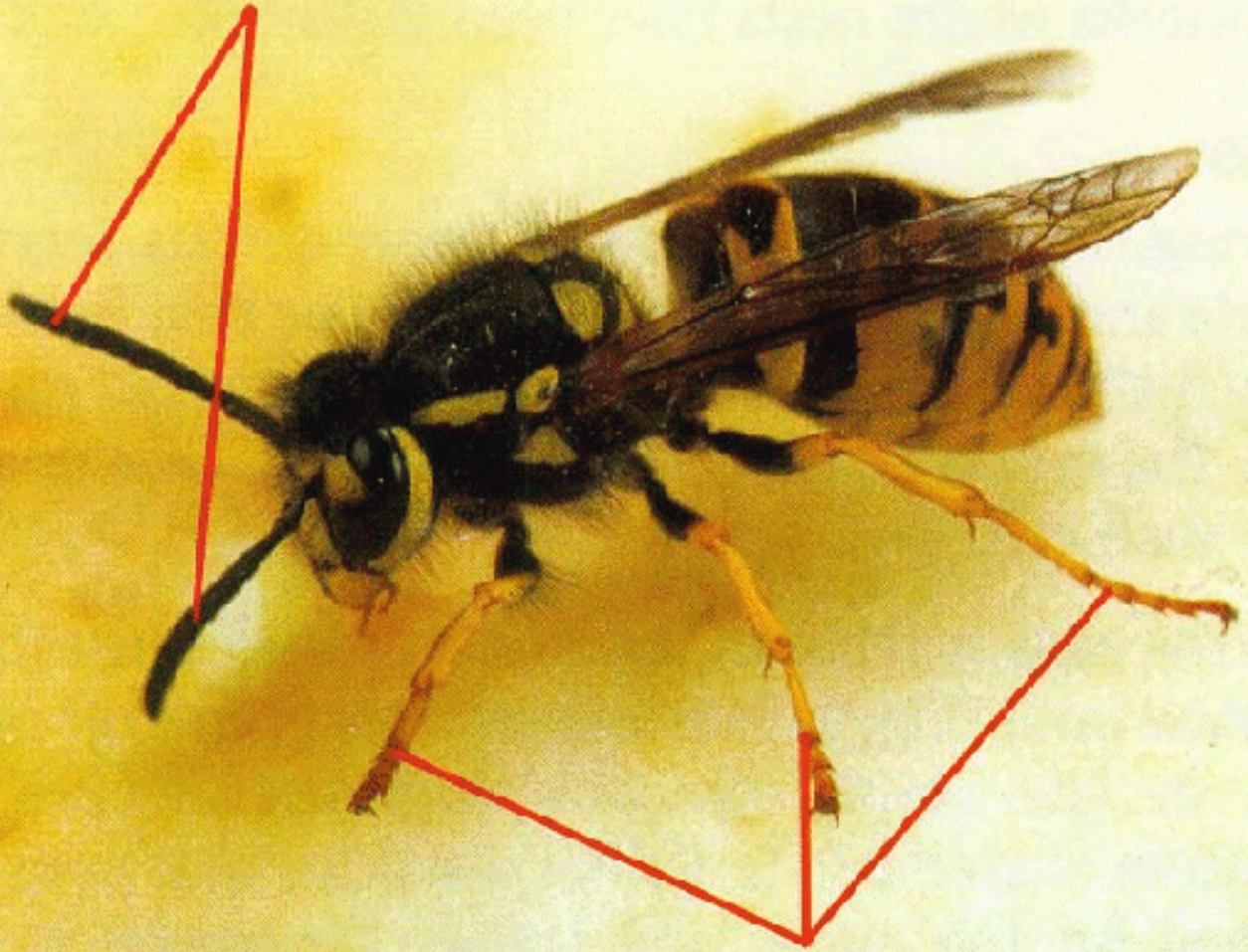
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Black antennae



Legs held close to body during flight

Figure 1. European wasp



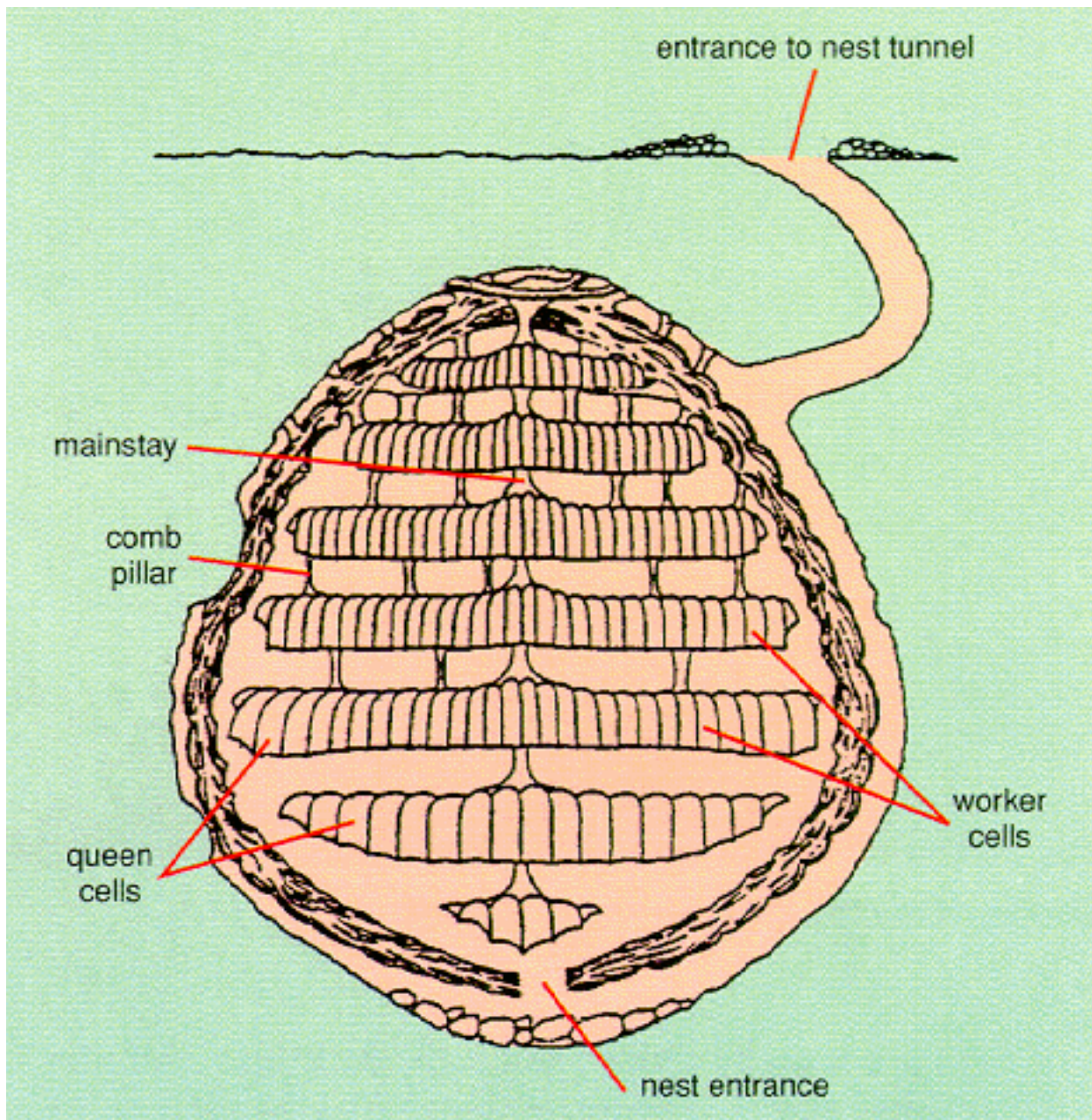


Figure 2. Diagram of European wasp nest





Figure 3. Nest of European wasp with part of the outer covering removed





Figure 4. European wasps feed on meat and fish.

