

honey bee

Apis mellifera

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Arthropoda
Class: Insecta
Order: Hymenoptera
Family: Apidae

ILLINOIS STATUS

common, nonnative

FEATURES

The honey bee is dark brown on the head and thorax with alternating red-brown and black bands on the abdomen. Four, clear wings are attached to the thorax. The body is covered with small hairs, including on the eyes. There are three distinct forms of the honey bee: the queen (fertile female) is about three-fourths inch long; the worker (sterile female) is about one-half inch in length; and the drone (male) is about five-eighths inch long.

BEHAVIORS

The honey bee may be found statewide in Illinois. It feeds on the nectar and pollen of flowers. It is a very important crop pollinator. Honey bees were brought to North America by early European settlers. These social insects nest in humanmade hives, although they occasionally will leave the hive and form a nest in a hollow tree or similar object. Unlike most other social insects, the colony does overwinter in the hive in a large mass. The colony has three castes, or divisions: workers (sterile females), drones (males) and the queen (fertile female). Honey bees communicate through “dancing.” Special movements a worker makes inform the other members of the hive how far away and in what direction a good source of nectar may be found. The odor carried by the same bee will indicate the type of flower that it is found on. The worker bees spend the first part of their life doing chores in the hive, including constructing the waxy combs, caring for the eggs and larvae and tending to the queen’s needs. The last part of their lives is spent gathering pollen and nectar. They exist only a few days in this foraging state before dying. A worker bee can sting but will die if it does so. The stinger is barbed and becomes anchored in the organism that is stung. As the bee pulls away, it leaves behind a section of its abdomen with the stinger.

ILLINOIS RANGE





bees on a honeycomb

adult worker





Aquatic Habitats

bottomland forests; marshes; peatlands; swamps; wet prairies and fens

Woodland Habitats

bottomland forests; coniferous forests; southern Illinois lowlands; upland deciduous forests

Prairie and Edge Habitats

black soil prairie; dolomite prairie; edge; gravel prairie; hill prairie; sand prairie; shrub prairie