



Class Insecta, Insects

Order Hymenoptera, Ants, bees, and wasps

Hymenoptera means “membraneous wings.” The hind wings are smaller than the front wings and have a row of tiny hooks, hamuli, that attach the two wings. There are two suborders. The smaller suborder includes sawflies and horntails, which are phytophagous. Bees, wasps, and ants belong to the larger suborder, which includes nectar, pollen, and insect feeders. Hymenoptera is the second largest group of insects, most of which are beneficial. These insects undergo complete metamorphosis and have complex behaviors. Most parasitic wasps do not sting humans. All hymenopterans have chewing mouthparts.

Wasps

Family Vespidae

Description and life history: This large group of well-known insects includes paper wasps, yellow jackets, hornets, mason wasps and potter wasps. Their bodies are black with yellow or whitish markings. Many species live in colonies consisting of queens, workers, and males.

Prey species: Adults are generalist predators, usually eating caterpillars while feeding their larvae a variety of insects. The adults kill their prey by biting or using their stinger. The drawbacks to using vespids as biological control agents are that they are generalists and that they are a nuisance to people, using their stinger not just on prey but on humans as well.



Yellow jacket adult killing a caterpillar. (355)
Photo: David Laughlin



Polistes species, paper wasp adults feed their larvae macerated insects. (353)
Photo: unknown



Potter wasp nests are provisioned with caterpillars. (354)
Photo: John Davidson