

## **Honeybee project at the Governor's Mansion**

Nearly 30,000 European honeybees (*Apis mellifera*) and two hives were placed on the front lawn of the Governor's Mansion in April 2016.

The honeybees were placed there to raise public awareness about the decline of bee populations, our dependence on the flying insect to pollinate much of the food we eat and their importance to Washington's agriculture economy. Another goal is to boost the pollination of plants at the mansion and on the Capitol Campus.

The project is a collaborative effort between the Olympia Beekeepers Association, Department of Enterprise Services and First Lady Trudi Inslee. The Department of Enterprise Services manages the buildings and grounds of the Capitol Campus in Olympia.

### **About honeybees**

Honeybees are normally about three-quarters of an inch long. Most bees are workers, which are female. Male honeybees are called "drones." Workers are slightly smaller than drones. All honeybees are reddish brown and black, with orangish-yellow rings on the abdomen (back part of body). The head, antennae and legs are black. Honeybees have thick, pale hair on the thorax (middle part of body).



Honeybees live in a nest, called a "hive." A single hive can have up to 60,000 bees, mostly workers. The hive is ruled over by a queen bee. She is the largest bee in the hive and is the only female to mate. The workers care for larvae (baby bees), make wax, build honeycomb, clean up the hive, store pollen, make honey, guard the hive, and collect pollen and nectar. Males mate with the queen and then die.

Honeybees gather nectar and pollen from flowers. Nectar is the liquid in a flower that the bees turn into honey and pollen is a powdery substance that must be transferred from one flower to another to make fruits, nuts and seeds. Larvae are fed "bee bread," a combination of pollen and honey.

### **Causes for population decline**

Honeybee populations are declining around the world for many reasons, including:

- Parasites, such as Varroa mites.
  - Pathogens and pests.
  - Nutrition problems due to a lack of diversity or availability of pollen and nectar sources.
  - Possible sublethal effects of pesticides.
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- Colony Collapse Disorder: a syndrome in which there are no adult bees or dead bee bodies in a hive but a live queen and immature bees are present. No scientific cause for the disorder has been proven.

About one-third of all food consumed in the U.S. is made possible by pollination, mainly by honeybees. An estimated \$15 billion worth of crops is pollinated by honeybees, including more than 130 fruits and vegetables.

### About bee stings

Honeybees are non-aggressive and generally will only sting when protecting a hive, according to the Olympia Beekeepers Association. Hornets and wasps, which are not related to honeybees, are much more likely to sting a person, according to the group. Honeybees are able to sting only once and will die after they have released their stinger.

It is only the female honeybee, or the worker bee, that sting. A bee will rarely sting when it is away from the colony foraging on pollen, nectar or water. However, a bee may sting if it is handled roughly (swatted at or stepped on), or feels alarmed in any way. Generally, if you leave a bee alone, it will leave you alone.



If a bee is buzzing around your head, do not swat at it. Instead of going away, swatting may be perceived as a threat and the bee may sting in self-defense.

Only a very limited portion of the population (one or two out of 1000) is allergic or hypersensitive to bee or wasp stings.

For your own safety, please keep a safe distance from the honeybee hives at the mansion.

### For more information

- Olympia Beekeepers Association: <http://www.olympiabeekeepers.org/>
- Washington State Beekeepers Association: <http://wasba.org/>
- Department of Enterprise Services: <http://www.des.wa.gov/>
- Gov. Jay Inslee and Trudi Inslee: <http://www.governor.wa.gov/about/about-inslees/about-trudi>
- Governor's Mansion: <http://wagovmansion.org/>