

# THE STRIPED INVADER

BY PHIL LESTER

A queen wasp is hiding under the bark of a tree. She is still and cold. It looks like she's fast asleep, but in fact, she's **hibernating**. For months, she hasn't eaten any food. Instead, she has been living on fat stored in her body.

Her hiding place is warm and dry. Rats and birds would eat her if they found her, but she's been lucky. Now it's spring, and it's time to wake up.

## MAKING A NEST

The young queen looks for a good, safe place to make a nest. It has to be dry and have lots of space. She finds an old mouse nest in the ground and starts digging out the soil. Then she flies to a fence post, chews off some wood, and mixes the wood with her saliva. She will use this mixture to make the nest.

Slowly the nest takes shape. The queen makes a few small, **hexagonal** cells and lays an egg in each cell. After two or three days, the eggs hatch into **larvae**. The larvae hang upside down in their nest. They need food and attention. It's dark in the nest, so each little larva scratches its **mandibles** on the side of its cell. This scratching tells the queen that the larva is hungry. The queen has to leave her nest to find food for her growing family.



## DANGER

After three or four weeks, some of the larvae turn into **pupae** and then into worker wasps. Once this happens, the queen doesn't leave the nest again. She spends the rest of her life laying eggs. The workers do all the **foraging** for food. They also look after the larvae, make the nest bigger, and defend the nest against **predators**.

The nest can be in great danger when it's new and small.

Other queen wasps are looking for places to build their nests. They won't think twice about trying to move in.

If that happens, the two queens will fight to the death. Scientists have found up to six dead queens in some nests. Rats or mice will also attack and eat a young nest.



## MORE AND MORE WASPS

As the **colony** grows, the wasps make their nest bigger. Some nests can contain many thousands of wasps. A big nest is safe from most dangers, but a summer flood or a careless animal standing on it might still destroy it. And of course, people could find it and get rid of it.

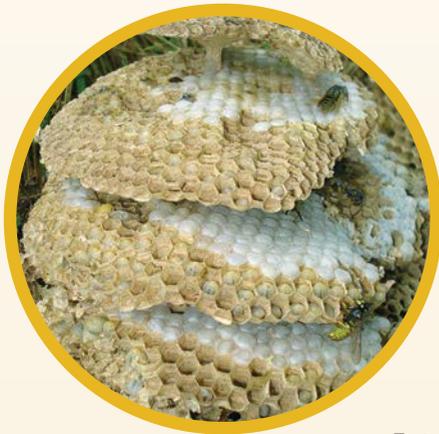
Over summer, the wasps will gather several kilograms of insects to feed their young. Spiders, flies, and caterpillars are all on the menu. The workers also gather fruit and nectar from plants. They use this food to help raise more and more worker wasps.

## NEW QUEENS

Then, in late summer, the workers build new, large cells. These are for new queens and male wasps (called drones). The new queens are about twice the size of the workers. They must be well fed and fat if they are to live through the coming winter. Each nest produces thousands of new queens, but only a handful will survive until the following spring.

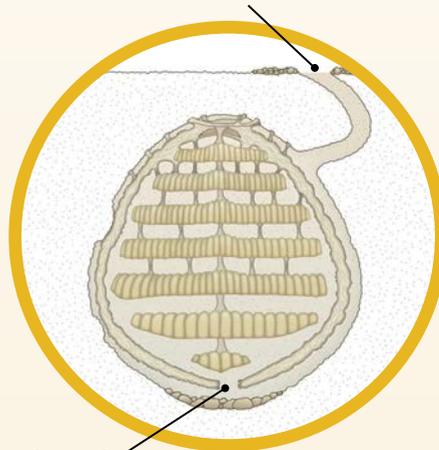
In autumn, the males and new queens leave the nest to mate. After they mate, the males die and the queens fly off to look for hiding places for the winter.

**A wasp nest that has been dug up**



**Inside the nest**

Entrance to nest tunnel

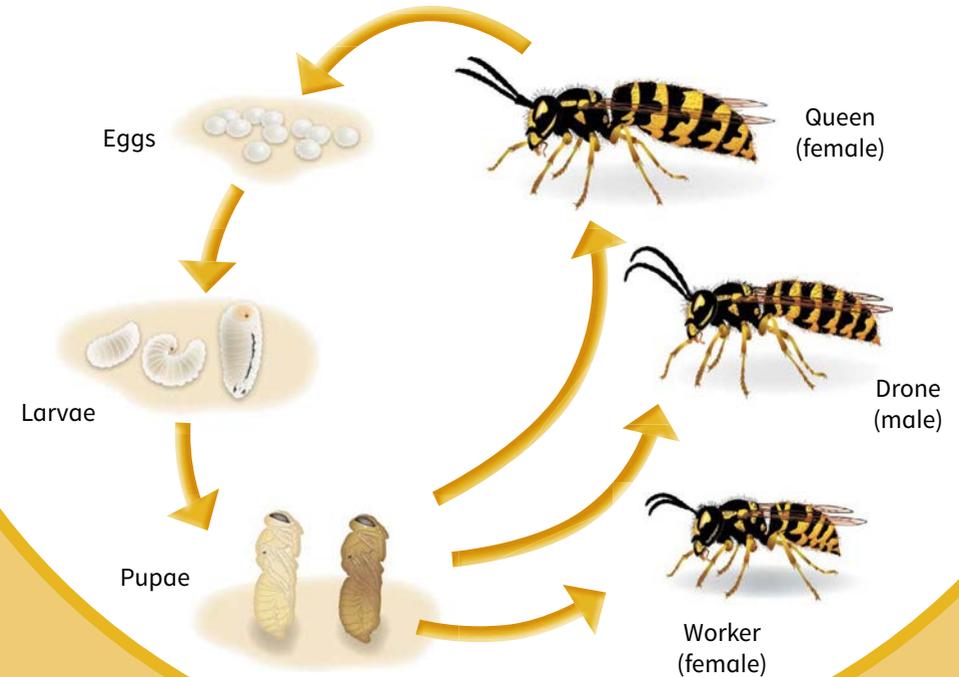


Entrance to nest

As winter arrives, the old nest falls to pieces and the workers and the old queen, who started the nest, die. But the new queens are hibernating in their hiding places. They will make sure that the wasps return in spring.

Then, the cycle will begin again.

## THE LIFE CYCLE OF THE WASP



## GLOSSARY

**colony:** a group of creatures living together

**foraging:** searching for food

**hexagonal:** six-sided

**hibernating:** inactive over winter (creatures that hibernate appear to be in a very deep sleep - their temperature drops and their breathing slows down)

**larvae:** the immature, wingless forms of insects (such as caterpillars)

**mandibles:** jaws

**predators:** creatures that eat other creatures

**pupae:** the stage between larvae and adult, when the insects are in cocoons

# The Striped Invader

by Phil Lester

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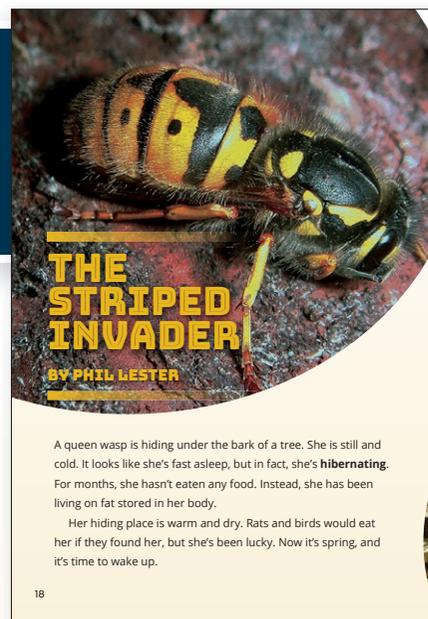
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