

The True Bees

hard-working neuters or workers. Their function in the community is simply to fertilize the queens at the proper time, and then they are of no further use in the world.

The Apoidea are now subdivided into no less than fourteen fullfledged families. These include the Apidæ, or true honey bees, the Bombidæ, or bumblebees, the solitary bees of the Anthophoridæ, the cuckoo bees of the family Nomadidæ, the small carpenter bees of the family Ceratinidæ, the large carpenter bees of the family Xylocopidæ, the mason, leaf-cutting and potter bees of the family Megachilidæ, the parasitic bees of the family Stelidæ, the sharp-tongued burrowing bees of the family Andrenidæ; the blunt-tongued burrowing bees of the family Colletidæ, and others.

The habits of the bees of these diverse families vary greatly, and most of the characteristics which they have in common have already been referred to. All, from their flower-visiting habits, are of great importance in the cross fertilization of plants, and without their aid the health of the plant world would suffer and its infinite variety would hardly have been achieved.

The most famous of all bees is naturally the common honey bee, an importation from Europe, not a native, which by the hand of man has become a true domesticated animal. The life history of this creature has been so often written about and may so easily be learned by consulting any encyclopedia or standard general work of reference that it does not seem necessary to describe it in detail here. The methods of bee culture in use admit of ready study of its economy.* In this brief summary of the general characteristics of bees we shall, therefore, confine ourselves to the wild and less known forms. A bumblebee has been selected for the typical life history, and little need therefore be said of the large and important family to which that species belongs, except to state that bumblebees now occur in most parts of the world, and that they are especially abundant in temperate and even boreal regions, large numbers inhabiting far northern localities where they abound in the brief arctic summer, and where they live a short but extremely busy life on account of the crowding together of the flowering periods of sub-polar plants.

*One of the strongest bits of descriptive writing known to me is Tolstoi's description of a queenless bee hive, in "War and Peace," where he likens Moscow on the approach of the French army to a hive deserted by the queen bee.