

Primary Worksheets: Velvet Ants



Velvet ants are definitely different to what they are named! They do appear to be velvety, but they are actually wasps, not ants! Male and female velvet ants look different. Males can fly, whereas the females cannot because they do not have wings, making them flightless. Females can sting but males cannot!

Velvet ants have a common species name of 'cowkiller', but their sting is not potent enough to kill a cow! This doesn't mean their sting is not strong. Their sting can cause intense pain to humans, leading them to believe it could kill a cow.

The largest velvet ant species can grow up to 2.5cm long! Males are slightly smaller than females. They can be found worldwide but are mainly found throughout the dry places in the U.S.



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The body of velvet ants consists of two parts, a thorax and an abdomen. They have a hard exoskeleton that can be shed. Their abdomen is red, covered with short red hairs. The body below and the head are black.

The exoskeleton of these wasps is like an armour plate that supports and protects their body. It prevents water loss and protects them from predators, especially from stings from other wasps.

Velvet ants are solitary creatures and are most active at night (nocturnal). They are not aggressive and will not sting you unless you make them angry. If they sense danger, males and females make squeaking sounds to communicate with each other. They are parasites that attack other nests.



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Female velvet ants have a very powerful stinging curved needle stinger. Female velvet ants are most commonly found along the ground looking for nests to lay eggs in.

The stinger is hidden at the tip of their abdomen and is nearly as long as it! It can change direction and be directed at different angles. They can use it to sting multiple times.

Adult velvet ants consume nectar and water from flowers like milkweed. Male velvet ants are most commonly found on flowers or flying above the ground searching for a mate. They may consume larvae (baby) and adult insects such as flies and beetles.



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Velvet ants are parasites who like to lay their eggs in other insect nests. After mating, females will go into the nests of bumblebees and wasps to lay their eggs. The female lays one or two of her eggs in the host's larvae (baby).

The best eggs for the velvet ant to lay their eggs in is a larvae that is in the cocoon stage. The larvae would have completed their feeding and are ready for pupation (stage of the cocoon).

The young velvet ant will grow inside and emerge from the host. Their first meal is the host! The case left over from the host will become the shell for their own cocoon, which they will spend the winter in. In late spring, they will emerge as an adult velvet ant.



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Answer the questions.

What is a velvet ant?

What do they look like?

Where do they hatch?



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Answer the questions.

What do they eat?

What is different of the male and female?

Are they dangerous?

