



Inside the Hive: A Barry the Beetle Podcast

BARRY

Welcome to today's podcast, "Inside the hive". I'm delighted to be joined by honey bee Belinda, here to tell us all about the sweetest life imaginable inside the honeycomb. Belinda, give us the buzz.

BELINDA

Well, Barry, first of all let me tell you it is not all sweetness and roses being a honey bee. It's actually really hard work.

BARRY

(Surprised) Really? But you get to buzz around all day, smelling the flowers, then taking the nectar back to the hive to make honey. What's so hard about that?

BELINDA

For starters, not all bees do that. Our hive is divided into groups. All the male bees are called drones—they only exist to help the Queen make more bees. Once they have done that, they simply die. The Queen rarely leaves the nest, just spends all her time laying her eggs. She has to be fed by the young worker bees or she runs out of energy. If that happens, the whole hive may die.

The rest of the hive are all worker bees and they are all female. Some young nurse bees have to protect the Queen and all her eggs. They make royal jelly: a special goo that new Queen bees develop in. Nurse bees work continuously to look after the new larvae as they hatch.

Some bees are on guard duty. Their job is to ensure nothing gets into the nest and, believe me, they have quite a job. Have you ever had to face down a twice-your-size, hungry centipede looking for lunch? In some species of bee, these guards will even sacrifice themselves, working together as a bee blanket to trap and overheat any threatening predators.

BARRY

Okay, I admit that sounds less fun. But still, most of you spend your lives swanning around the flowers gathering nectar. That doesn't sound too hard to me.

BELINDA

Bees like me – the pollinators – have to visit around 1,500 plants a day to collect enough nectar to keep honey production going in our hives. That's 1,500 flowers for every one of the 10,000 – 60,000 bees in the hive. True, the flowers are lovely and a day spent in a blossom-filled orchard is



pretty nice, but it's very tiring work. After every trip, we go back to the hive to turn the nectar into honey, then straight back out again. And of course, every day is the same.

BARRY

What about the humans, how do they treat you?

BELINDA

Some go crazy if you buzz by, minding your own business. Others stamp on you or swat you with a newspaper. We try to avoid stinging anyone, because, as you know, using our sting means we'll probably die. Sometimes, though, we must defend ourselves.

Recently, some humans seem to have realised we are struggling and have begun planting wildflowers for us. In return, we keep pollinating their plants, which helps grow their food, and provides them with honey.

At the end of the day, it may be tiring, but I love being a honey bee. It means I'm a vital part of life on Earth – who wouldn't be proud of that?

BARRY

And there you have it folks – life inside the hive. Tune in tomorrow where we chat to Eric the earthworm about why he really is a gardener's best friend.

INFERENCE FOCUS

1. Why does Barry think life as a honey bee is "the sweetest life imaginable"?
2. Why does Belinda describe the pollinator bee's day as tiring?
3. If there is only ever one Queen bee in the hive, why are new Queen eggs laid?
4. Why is the goo that the new Queen eggs develop in called Royal Jelly?
5. Do you think Belinda is proud to be a bee? If so why?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

V

How does Belinda describe life in the hive? Find and copy three words.

V

What do you think it means to "overheat" a predator?

R

Are the worker bees: male / female / both?

R

Name three jobs different groups of bees have?

P

What will happen to humans if bees die out?