



## Bumblebee (genus *Bombus*)

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### Introduction

The sight of a 'cute and cuddly' bumblebee (genus *Bombus*) might be familiar to many people from Europe, who remember these insects as less intrusive and aggressive than European wasps and honeybees. In Australia, however, bumblebees could become a serious pest.

The large earth bumblebee (*Bombus terrestris*) currently occurs in Tasmania, where one queen was illegally introduced several years ago. The species has since spread over the length of the island and there is a risk that bumblebees could be introduced through sea or air travel to the Australian mainland. Bumblebees have so far been intercepted in Queensland and Victoria.

The introduction of bumblebees in Australia could cause:

- competition for nectar with native nectar feeders (birds, possums) and honeybees;
- inefficient pollination of native flora;
- more efficient pollination of "sleeper weeds", ie exotic weeds which are currently not widely spread because they rely on bumblebees for pollination.

Bumblebees could affect home gardeners as they may nest in compost heaps or other garden features. They defend their nest vigorously and can sting repeatedly, which may cause a severe allergic reaction in some people.

### What do bumblebees look like?

Bumblebees are hairier and more heavily built than most other bees or wasps found in Australia. The large earth bumblebee is black with one yellow/ochre band across the front of the thorax and another yellow/ochre band across the abdomen (see Figure 1). An important identifying feature of the large earth bumblebee is the tip of the abdomen, which is buff or white in colour.

Large earth bumblebee queens are 30–35 mm in length and make a loud buzzing sound during flight. Workers are highly variable in size, ranging from 8–22 mm in length. Males are similar in size and appearance to large workers (see Figure 2).



Figure 1: Large earth bumblebee (*Bombus terrestris*) (Photo by Joe Le Montagner)

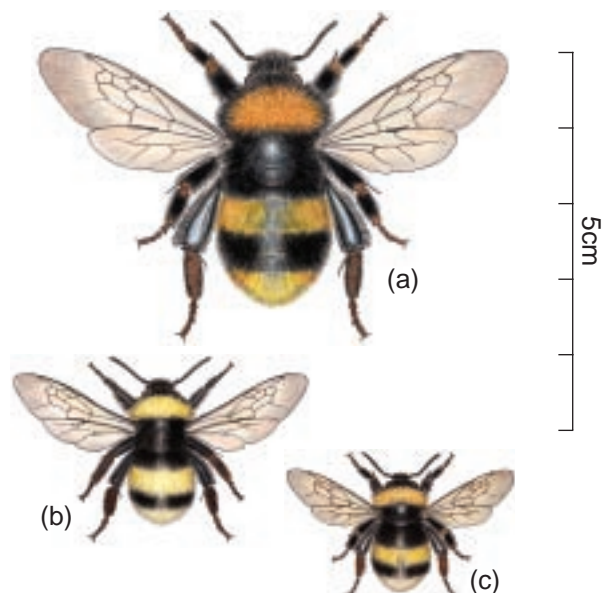


Figure 2: Size of bumblebee queen (a), drone (b) and worker (c) (Courtesy of Mike Tobias, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery)

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## What to do when you have spotted a bumblebee?

Suspect bumblebees should be reported to the Department of Agriculture's *Pest and Disease Information Service* on 1800 084 881. If you are unsure and want to collect a bee for examination:

- kill the bee in methylated spirits or ethyl alcohol;
- remove the dead bee from the killing agent and place it in a tightly capped glass jar or container;
- deliver or mail the specimen to:  
Pest and Disease Information Service  
Department of Agriculture  
3 Baron Hay Court  
South Perth WA 6151

**WARNING:** Bumblebees can sting. Do not handle live bees. Only collect bumblebees if you are competent in the collection of stinging insects and it is safe to do so.