

Wasps

New Zealand has several kinds of native wasps which have evolved here and have never become a nuisance. In recent years there have been four social species accidentally introduced which are classed as pests.

Social wasps live as colonies in nests of honeycomb-like cells. They form complex social groups and all members of a colony help raise the young.



Common wasp

Introduced social wasps

German and common wasps

These wasps are very similar in appearance, and both have the characteristic black and yellow colouration.

The German wasp was introduced in the 1940s and the common wasp arrived relatively recently but is now widespread.

Both species live in large colonies, about the size of a soccer ball. These colonies can become huge if they manage to survive over winter.

German wasp nests are grey. Common wasp nests are brown. The world's largest recorded wasp nest was discovered at Waimauku (near Auckland). It was 3.75 metres tall and 1.7 metres wide.

Impact of social wasps



German wasp

New Zealand has some of the highest densities of German and common wasps in the world. This is because they have no natural predators here, our winters are mild and there is plenty of food for them.

Social impacts

Wasps are a nuisance to forestry gangs, and a worry to tourist operators. They are unwelcome guests at summer picnics and barbecues. No-one finds a wasp sting a fun experience.

The venom from a wasp sting contains several toxins that can cause a hypersensitive or allergic reaction in some people.

Environmental impacts

Wasps are a major problem in some beech forests where they consume massive amounts of honeydew. Honeydew is produced by a native scale insect and is an important food for native birds, bats, insects and lizards.

Wasps also eat huge numbers of native insects and have even been seen killing newly hatched birds. By eating so much, they upset the natural food chain of the forest.

In some beech forests there are an estimated 12 nests, or 10,000 worker wasps, per hectare. This makes the numbers of wasps in these areas higher than that of all native birds, stoats and rodents, put together.

Paper wasps



Asian paper wasp

Although not as much of a problem as German and common wasps, paper wasps have also been introduced to New Zealand.

The Asian paper wasp has been found in the North Island and top of the South Island. The Australian paper wasp remains confined to the north of the North Island.

Both paper wasps build small nests out of regurgitated woody material, about the size of a pear.