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“ If there is one phrase that makes me mad it's 'What is the point of wasps!' If everything has to have a point then for wasps there is so much more to them than that famous point on the end of their abdomens - get past the sting (that they most rarely use to harm us) and you enter a world of intrigue - they are great recyclers, pollinators, pest control agents and above all they carry out their services in a vibrant buzz of colour and energy - wasps are among my favourite creatures because of these reasons and many more. ”



**Nick Baker**

### Why are wasps after my picnic?

Towards the end of the summer, wasps are seen more frequently as they hunt for sweet food. They are sometimes considered a nuisance to humans, as they try to feed on sugary drinks and jam sandwiches. **The wasps are looking for a sugar fix!** In late summer, the adults are prioritising and feeding the young male wasps in the hope that they will fertilise a new queen, who will start a new generation of wasps. However, around the time of the first winter frost, the nest begins to break down. The grubs that the worker wasps raised, have now grown up and no longer secrete the sugary liquid they once did to feed the adult workers. Each wasp is then out for itself on the hunt for sugar!

## Wonderful wasps



“ Probably the easiest question I ever get asked as a naturalist is; "what is the point of wasps?"! Well, where do I start! Wasps are some of the most fascinating creatures on the planet; there are species that parasitise other insects, that catch insects on the wing or pluck pests from our plants. Some are solitary, and may lay their eggs in spiders or caterpillars, others live in highly co-ordinated and complex communities, functioning in brain-bending unison to realise common aims. I'm not just endlessly fascinated by wasps, I LOVE wasps! ”

**Steve Backshall**

### Inside:

- Amazing wasp facts
- Stories from your favourite TV wildlife presenters





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## Did you know that not all wasps are black and yellow?



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Like this tiny metallic red and green wasp (*Chrysis ruddii*), wasps come in a variety of colours, shapes and sizes, ranging from large, black and yellow striped species to tiny metallic red and green species. There are hundreds of species of wasps in the UK, the majority of which feed their young (larvae) on other insects.

Ants, Bees and Wasps are insects in the order **Hymenoptera**, meaning 'membranous wings'. Ants, bees and wasps that have a sting or use their 'stinger' for laying eggs, fall into a group called 'Aculeata'. Within this group are social wasps, solitary wasps and cuckoo wasps.



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**Social wasps** - There are only eight species of social wasp. These include the hornet and 'jam pot' wasps, that are among the most familiar of all our British insects. Hornets are the 'gentle giant' of the wasp world. They are brilliant pest-controllers, amazing architects and great recyclers – eating up rotten fruit that has fallen to the ground.

**Solitary wasps** - There are around 260 species of solitary wasp (do not live in social groups, and even though some live close together there is no social structure). Some of these wasps are excellent pollinators and play an important role in the web of life. Many solitary wasps specialise on a single species or group insects. The female paralyses the prey with her sting and places it in the nest as food for her larva. A sand digger wasp carrying a paralysed grub to its burrow.



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**Cuckoo wasps** - All cuckoo wasps are solitary, external parasites. The UK's most common cuckoo wasp, *Vespula austriaca*, is a parasite of their close relative, the **Red wasp**. The cuckoo wasp queen enters the red wasps colony and either kills the host queen or drives her away from the nest. She then uses the red wasp workers to raise her offspring.

### What's the point of wasps?

Wasps eat flies, aphids, caterpillars and other invertebrates, making them an important insect-controlling predator.

Wasps are amazing architects, building paper nests from chewed up wood.

Wasps are master crafts-women (all workers are female). Their nests are made up of combs of hexagonal paper cells.

Wasp nests are home to some of our most beautiful, pollinating hoverflies.