



**STROUD  
DISTRICT  
COUNCIL**

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## PEST CONTROL SERVICE

### Pest Information Leaflet No. 5

## **SOLITARY BEES or (MASONRY BEES)**



2002-2003  
Crime Reduction in Rural Areas  
2004-2005  
Services for Older People

### Description

There are about 200 different species of solitary bee in northern Europe. Although they may live gregariously, they are known as solitary bees because each individual female makes her own nest, lays and tends her eggs and collects her own food.

### Biology and Habitat

According to the species, solitary bees (often called masonry bees, mortar bees or mining bees) may construct their nests in the ground, in plant stems, in timber, or in buildings where crevices in masonry and woodwork offer good shelter. The nests may be built of various types of material, such as mud, plant material, or of substances produced by the bees themselves.

The solitary bee does not form true colonies although several may live close together. Like other bees they have a sting but are not very aggressive. In the wild they live in chalk or clay, but they may also live in mortar if it is not too hard. They nearly always choose a sunny aspect and are most active when the sun is shining.

If the mortar is soft enough these bees dig cylindrical, horizontal tunnels in the mortar, about the diameter of a pencil, and they are lined with a very fine, transparent material which is secreted by the bees salivary glands. Each individual cell is filled with a mixture of pollen and nectar. When it is completed the bee lays an egg in it, seals it with a lid and

starts on the next cell in the series, there are normally about

2 - 8 cells in each tunnel. The larvae which hatch from the eggs feed on the stored food, overwinter in

the cell, pupate in the following spring and emerge as adult bees, usually in early July.

### Control

In normal circumstances the damage done by these bees is fairly restricted but if much mortar is being removed it may be necessary to replace it.

When the bees are not flying (September to April) this can be done by simply scraping out the loose mortar together with the bee cells and larvae and repointing. If the repair work has to be done during the period when the bees are on the wing they will need to be dealt with first otherwise they will be able to dig new holes before the mortar has hardened.

Dusting the affected areas of the wall with an insecticide powder will usually solve the problem. It should be remembered however, that even though the bees living in the mortar have been killed there will always be a risk of new damage so long as there are still areas of wall with loose mortar.

### Further Information

Birds such as sparrows and tits often climb around walls searching for insects and spiders which they pull out of the holes, normally they do not damage the wall but sparrows and pigeons may peck lime out of the mortar and in some cases may damage the bricks. Now and again woodpeckers may find out that there are fat juicy bee larvae in the wall and they can hack out craters in the mortar.

### **Pest Control Service**

Stroud District Council does not normally undertake the treatment of solitary bees, since their activity is individual they do not form colonies, house maintenance is the best deterrent.

For details and current charges of the professional service we can offer for other household pests please telephone Stroud 754919 or write to:

Pest Control Service  
Environmental Health Service  
Stroud District Council  
Ebley Mill, Westward Road  
Stroud, Glos. GL5 4UB

e-mail:- [environmental.health@stroud.gov.uk](mailto:environmental.health@stroud.gov.uk)

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