



Hover flies

Hover flies have a characteristic flight pattern - hovering in one spot, moving suddenly forwards or sideways, and then hovering again.



Standard Common Name

Hover flies

Alternative Name/s

Flower flies

Identification

Hover flies are small to medium sized flies with large heads, large eyes, and small or inconspicuous antennae. Their bodies are medium to slender, with a waist that is not significantly narrow, unless it is a wasp mimicking species. They have one pair of clear wings, and the banded forms have yellow and black bands of equal width.



Hover fly mimic wasps and this can include having a warning coloration of yellow and black, a narrow waist like a wasp and even the ability to mimic the stinging action of a wasp, by pushing the tip of the abdomen into your fingers if they are caught and held. However, they do not sting and are quite harmless.



Aphid-eating hover fly larvae are flattened, legless and maggot-like. Most are green or brown in colour, going largely unnoticed as they crawl over foliage in search of their aphid prey.

Some people mistake hover flies for wasps or bees because of their black and yellow-striped abdomens and also because they can occur in huge numbers. However, they are actually members of a fly family that have evolved as wasp and bee mimics.

Size range

8 mm - 20 mm

Similar Species

Hover flies are wasp and bee mimics

Distribution

Hover flies are found throughout Australia.

Habitat

Hover flies live in urban areas.

Feeding and Diet

Hover flies may appear in large numbers during hot weather. They linger in gardens to feed at flowers and to seek shade. Many species perform the useful role of ridding the garden of aphids, as they lay their eggs in aphid colonies and the larvae (maggots) feed on the aphids.

Other behaviours and adaptations

Hover flies are also called flower flies because they are commonly seen during warmer months hovering among flowers, feeding and mating. They pollinate many plants and help keep aphids under control.

They hover in the one spot, move suddenly forwards or sideways, and then hover again.

Life cycle

Some hover fly species (*Eristalis* sp) lay their eggs in stagnant water. These aquatic larvae have a long thin breathing tube - hence the common name, "rat-tailed maggots". Another hover fly species (*Microdon* sp) has a larval form that scientists originally classified as a mollusc because it looks rather like a small slug. *Microdon* larvae survive by scavenging in ant nests, mimicking the ants' chemicals in order to escape detection by their hosts.

Treatment

Treatment for this pest is very limited and whilst not required, some customers find them annoying, or may have children parents or customers fearful they are wasps. Exopest can spray foliage or landing zones such as under eaves, verandas and pergolas, which will reduce numbers. No guarantee is possible, as they may be breeding on another property and the fact they fly and hover means they may not come in contact with the residual sprays. Contact our office to see if we can assist you.

Classification

Family:

Syrphidae

Superfamily:

Syrphoidea

Order:

Diptera

Class:

Insecta

Phylum:

Arthropoda

References

- CSIRO. 1994. *Insects of Australia*. CSIRO Publishing: Canberra.
- Hadlington, P. & J. Johnston. 1998. *An Introduction to Australian Insects*. UNSW Press: Sydney.
- Zbrowski, P. & R. Storey. 1995. *A Field Guide to Insects in Australia*. Reed Books: Sydney.