

Bees vary in shape and size, prefer different foods and behave differently. Each is best at pollinating different plants. Healthy bee diversity assists resilient and diverse plant life and including the food we eat.

Native Bees

Did you know NZ has just under 30 species of native bee? Their appearance and behaviour means they often go unnoticed in gardens and forests. A lot is still to be learnt about our native bees, but they are among the most effective pollinators of native plants such as Manuka, Kanuka and Pohutakawa. Most species are endemic, if they are lost to NZ they cannot be replaced!

- Smaller than imported bees and generally black.
- Don't sting and are not aggressive.
- Do not have hives or produce honey.
- Live in small families. Females lay 3–10 eggs in a lifetime.
- Live in nests under bare undisturbed soils, or in hollow flax stems or other plant material. Don't share nests but many nests are often in close proximity.
- Bees die at the end of Autumn but larvae survive over winter, emerging in mid spring.
- Larvae are fed with nectar and pollen from nearby flowers.
- They don't travel as far as imported bees (100 m or less) so need flowers nearby. Concrete jungles or open land with short grass do not suit our native friends.
- Are not affected by the Varroa mite that threatens honeybees.

Wuhoo Challenge

Colour in the native and introduced bees colouring sheet. Visit the Timaru Botanic Gardens and Centennial Park and go on a bee hunt. TIP: native bees like loose soil and clay banks.

TELL THE BEES YOUR NEWS

Did you know at time NZ was being colonised a custom existed in Britain to "tell the bees" of family news (particularly deaths). Failure to "tell the bees" may result in the bees flying away and other bad luck. Bees were often among the first to hear big news and the message may even have been delivered as a poem or song. Bees were considered spiritual beings but the custom also recognised the connection between bees and human survival.

BE A BEE AMBASSADOR

- Avoid pesticides and weed killers that are harmful to bees.
- Plant native plants in your garden. Even a few can help.
- Keep a saucer of water topped up in the garden.
- Plant flowering plants and try to pick plants that flower at different times of year.
- Learn what native bees look like and don't squash them. They can be mistaken for flies. When at rest, bee wings are folded into their bodies. Bees have two sets of wings. Bees' eyes are more on the side of the head. Antennae tend to be longer.

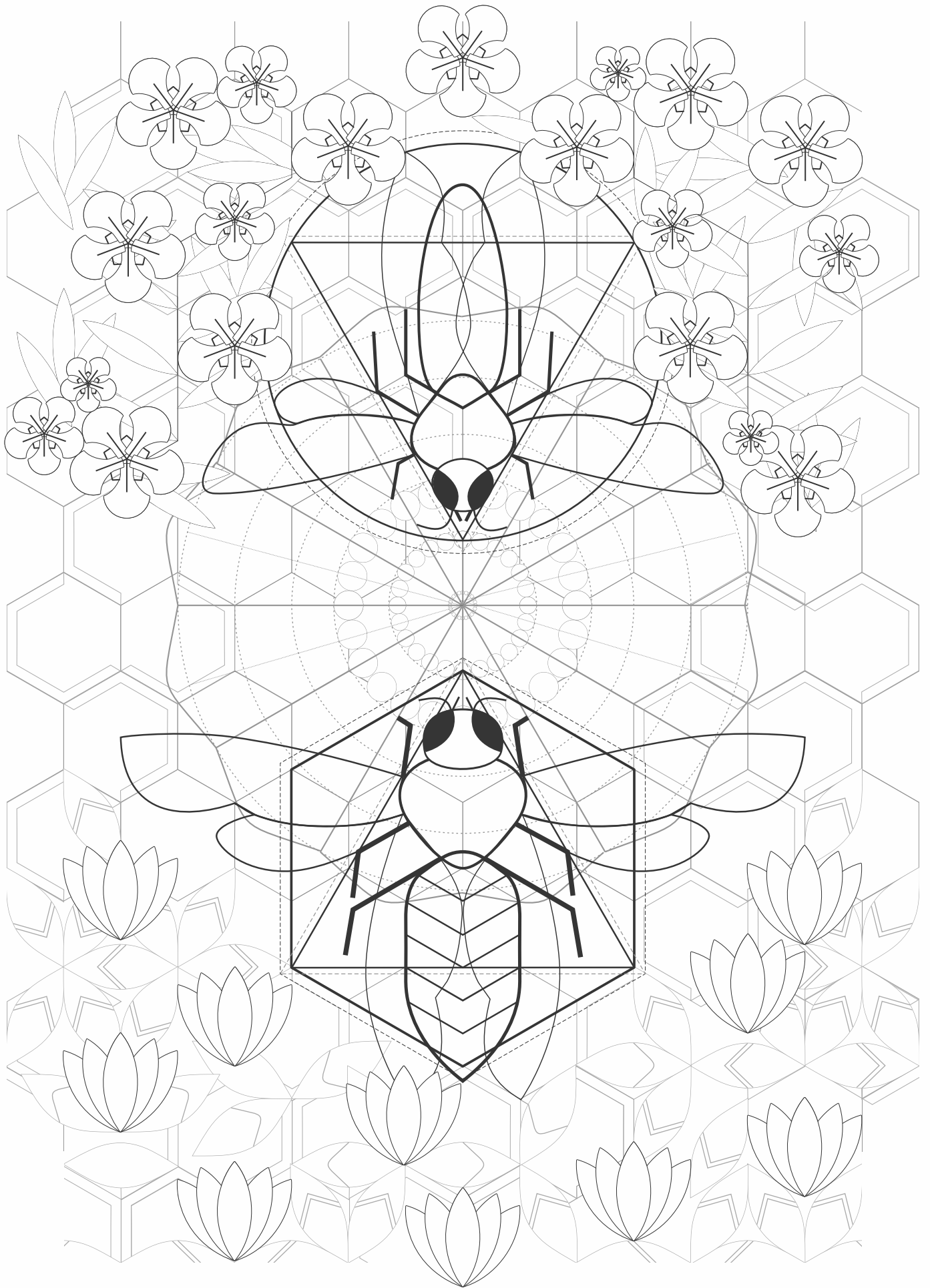
Introduced Bees

- 1839 Bees were thought to have first arrived in New Zealand with a missionary at Hokianga.
- 1840 Over two years bees reached Nelson from Sydney and were distributed from there as numbers grew.
- 1866 Reports of people eating wild honey in Canterbury suggest private individuals had bought bees into Canterbury well before acclimatisation societies.
- 1870 First suggestion to formally import bees and in 1872 a resolution was made to import with the main motivation being to fertilise red clover.
- 1876 It was hard importing bees! First bee shipment in 1876 and two more shipments in 1884 all failed with the bees dying at sea. Imagine the disappointment!
- 1880 First humble (bumble) bee shipment bought into South Canterbury by a Mrs Belfield. They were also hard to import as only 2 of the 145 survived! Later shipments in 1885 and 1886 were more successful and in 1886 J B A Acland saw the first humble bee in his garden in Peel Forest. By 1887 they were frequently seen around Timaru to the delight of seed growers.
- 1885 Finally, 15 years after it was first proposed, a successful shipment of honey bees arrives in Canterbury (these were settled in Deans Estate in Christchurch which is now 'Deans Bush' in Riccarton). Other shipments followed and the bees rapidly spread throughout Canterbury.
- 1906 The first Apiaries Act, among other things, outlaws the common practice of shaking the swarm into a kerosene case, destroying every bee when honey was harvested!
- 2019 An explosion in honey bee numbers on the back of the popular and productive manuka honey sector.

Bee Superpowers

- They pollinate about a third of the food humans eat.
- A 500-gram jar of honey is the result of around 2 million visits to flowers and the life's work of around 1000 bees.
- Honey bees can air condition. Through teamwork and beating their wings in just the right places they can keep the hive at a steady temperature all year round.
- A bumblebee can do the work of 50 honey bees and pollinate plants honey bees can't. Great in glasshouses, they use a rapid buzzing technique to shake pollen from tomatoes at 450 flowers per hour.
- Honey bees communicate changes in season or when flowers blossom to the hive and can coordinate quick redistributions of the roles of the worker bees to suit.
- Bees are capable of making collective decisions, such as where to locate a new hive, on the basis of how enthusiastic reports from 'scout bees' are.
- Up to 1000 honey bees can die from exhaustion a day in a large hive. A queen lays her own body weight in eggs every day to fill the gaps.
- Carry about 90% of their weight in pollen, which requires so much energy they are only ever 40 minutes from starvation.
- Bumblebees can fly 50 km/hr or more, can forage over 1–1.5km away, and find home by remembering key landmarks along the journey.

LEARN MORE: The South Canterbury Museum



BEES

NATIVE & INTRODUCED BEES

Colourful Facts

You are welcome to print and share to celebrate Timaru. But artwork is not to be used for financial gain. Artwork By Roselyn Fauth © WuhooTimaru 2019

[WuhooTimaru.co.nz](https://www.wuhootimaru.co.nz)

