

TWO WASPS IN OUR AREA ... Alison Watson & Ade Foster: Drawings by Kaye Traynor

Wasps belong to the Order Hymenoptera (wasps, bees and ants) of the Class Insecta, Phylum Athropoda. The Apocrita suborder has a distinct waist between the thorax and abdomen. They can be parasitic, social or non-social. Wasps of the non-social group provision a cell with paralysed spiders or other insects, and lay eggs for the developing larvae to feed on. The nest can be on the ground, in plant stems or an existing cavity.

Mud-Dauber Wasp *Sceliphron laetum*

This wasp makes mud nests in dry protected sites on buildings, where they can find the right building material. The female makes a low humming sound as she gathers the mud, and then at the nest, a high-pitched singing noise. She provisions the nest with paralysed insects for the larvae to feed on, lays one egg, and continues to make mud tubes. The larvae feed on the insects, and then form pupae for the winter, emerging as adults the following summer.

A local resident at Moggs Creek observed the nest-building process as a wasp built a nest on a wooden beam on the dining room ceiling. Household members watched a black, slender wasp, with a thread-like waist, fly to the backyard swimming pool, where it appeared to be drinking water, before it flew into bushland, where it could be seen gathering mud. It returned, extending the length of its nest, all the time making a high-pitched singing noise. The performance was repeated until the nest was complete – taking one day. They did not observe her bringing an insect or spider to put in the nest. The nest is still present on the beam. Many others have been seen around the outside of the building – in the door frame, on internal book ends, and under the hand rail on the deck.

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Sand Wasp *Bembix* sp

While working on a house in Anglesea in January – February, I noticed a number of colourful wasps flitting about close to a sandy patch of ground. I spent a lunch break observing about ten of these lovely little insects digging and provisioning their nest tunnels.

They were sand wasps, probably *Bembix palmata*, the Yellow Sand Wasp. These wasps are about 15 – 20 mm long, brightly coloured, with yellow and black markings on head and thorax, and a boldly striped black and white abdomen. The legs are bright yellow with black joints, and the last segment (basitarsus) of the forelegs is quite broadened, with many little spines to aid digging.

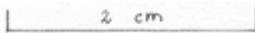
The wasps spent some time digging a burrow in the sandy soil, their front legs frantically throwing grains of sand behind them. Once the burrow was to their liking, they would fill the entrance with loose grains then take to the air, hovering for a few seconds, and then performing two or three increasing circles around the entrance before flying off to search for prey. They would be back in minutes, barely able to fly with the weight of the March fly they held suspended beneath them. They would repeat the circling flight (presumably used to locate the burrow) before landing beside the entrance. The loose grains were quickly removed and the march fly dragged into the burrow. An egg is laid on the paralysed fly, providing fresh meat for the larvae when they hatch. After about thirty seconds, the wasp would exit the tunnel, cover the entrance, and fly off again in

search of more prey. Assuming that each burrow is provisioned by one individual wasp, I watched one nest carefully, and counted six march flies deposited in a thirty minute period.

Sand wasps are cosmopolitan and very widely distributed, being found in Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia and the Americas. There are about 380 species worldwide, and most are brightly coloured. They prey almost exclusively on species of flies to feed the young, while the adults themselves feed on pollen.



Mud Dauber Wasp



Sand Wasp Settled



Sand Wasp In Flight

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