Daily News

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Animals World News

Beyond Bee Leaf!

What do bumblebees feed on?

- **Bumblebees feed on the nectar and pollen of flowers.**
- **A team of Swiss scientists believe they nibble leaves so plants flower earlier.**

Photo: A bee feeding on a flower.

Bees' Nimbling Helps Plants Flower

The large fuzzy bodies and loud droning sound of bumblebees make them one of the most easily recognisable insects.

They survive by buzzing from flower to flower eating the pollen and drinking the nectar contained in each one.

You might think then that if enough plants hadn't grown their flowers yet, bumblebees might struggle to find food and drink. However, it appears that bumblebees have come up with a clever trick to try and ensure this doesn't happen.

Scientists observed the novel behaviour of bees biting holes in plants. To the scientists' amazement, the bees' nibbling of the leaves seemed to make some plants produce flowers up to 30 days earlier than they would naturally.

Interestingly, the scientists are not entirely sure why this works. They themselves used sharp tools to try and imitate the holes that the bees had made in mustard leaves and tomato plants. But their efforts didn't cause the flowers to bloom early at all.

The scientists found this very confusing. They now think that there may be something special in the bees' saliva which encourages the plants to flower unusually early.

The UK alone is home to more than 270 types of bee. There are around 250 types of solitary bees, 24 types of bumblebee, but only one type of honey bee.

A colony of honey bees will live through the winter eating their stored honey. Bumblebees, on the other hand, only make enough honey to survive the warm months and then die off leaving only the queens who hibernate alone.

Glossary

droning	A continuous low humming sound.
ensure	Make certain that something will happen.
novel	Interestingly new or unusual.
imitate	Replicate, mimic or copy.

Questions

1. How much earlier did some plants produce flowers after the bumblebees had nibbled on them? Tick one answer.

   - ○ 3 days
   - ○ 24 days
   - ○ 30 days
   - ○ 250 days

2. Use the information in the article to give one difference between honey bees and bumblebees.

   _____

   _____

   _____

3. What did the team of scientists find 'confusing'?

   _____

   _____

   _____

4. Tick the best synonym for "special" as it is used in the following sentence: 'They now think that there may be something special in the bees' saliva'.

   - ○ best
   - ○ celebrate
   - ○ common
   - ○ unique

5. Tick which headline does **not** summarise the story.

   - ○ Bees Nibble on Plants to Order Up Future Food
   - ○ Biting Bees Bother Plants into Blooming before They Want To
   - ○ Bees Speed Up Flowering on Purpose
   - ○ Bees Hibernate over Winter

6. Summarise the key information in this article using 20 words or fewer.

   _____

   _____

   _____

Answers

1. How much earlier did some plants produce flowers after the bumblebees had nibbled on them? Tick one answer.

   ○ 3 days
   ○ 24 days
   ✓ **30 days**
   ○ 250 days

2. Use the information in the article to give one difference between honey bees and bumblebees.
   Accept an answer referencing the difference in the number of species, that honey bees make more honey than bumblebees or that honey bee colonies survive the winter while bumblebee colonies die out.

3. What did the team of scientists find 'confusing'?
   Accept an answer which references that when the scientists damaged the plants it didn't speed up the flowering as much as when the bees damaged the plants. e.g. Their man-made damage didn't speed up flowering as much as the bees' damage did.

4. Tick the best synonym for "special" as it is used in the following sentence: 'They now think that there may be something special in the bees' saliva'.

   ○ best
   ○ celebrate
   ○ common
   ✓ **unique**

5. Tick which headline does **not** summarise the story.

   ○ Bees Nibble on Plants to Order Up Future Food
   ○ Biting Bees Bother Plants into Blooming before They Want To
   ○ Bees Speed Up Flowering on Purpose
   ✓ **Bees Hibernate over Winter**

6. Summarise the key information in this article using 20 words or fewer.
   Accept a reasonable answer which includes the story's key information in 20 words or fewer, e.g. Bees bite holes in plants to make them flower earlier.