

Marvelous Animal Adaptions

By Jenn Roe

Hoverflies



The oblique streaktail hoverfly, common on Mount Diablo, visits many types of flowers. Like all true flies, it has only two wings, while bees and wasps have four (two sets).



This drone hoverfly mimics its namesake, the drone (male) bee, in color and striping. However, the fly's large eyes are about the width of its abdomen, a feature of flies but not bees.

Hoverflies are Flies in Disguise

If it looks like a bee and acts like a bee, is it a bee? Look closer, because that bee or wasp-like insect you see on the flower just might be a hoverfly, a fly in disguise.

Hoverflies, also called flower flies, belong to a large insect family, Syrphidae, with over 200 **species** in California. Many species **mimic** the look of a bee or wasp to defend against **predators** that don't want to eat creatures with stingers. But unlike bees and wasps, the hoverfly has no stinger and is harmless to predators and humans. Same as all true flies, it has two wings (one set) compared to bees and wasps that have four (two sets of wings). Also, notice the hoverfly's big eyes are about the width of its abdomen, much bigger than a bee's eyes relative to its bee body.

Hoverflies are often seen hovering around flowers, hence their name. Many species feed mainly on nectar and pollen. They are important **pollinators** that provide this essential service while nectaring (sipping nectar).



Hoverflies can

be beneficial in another way, as pest control. The **larvae** (maggots) of some species eat aphids and other soft-bodied insects that gardeners and farmers consider pests. This is true for the oblique streaktail (*Allograpta obliqua*) pictured on this page. The female streaktail lays her eggs on plant parts near aphids. When eggs hatch, the fly larvae's food is within easy reach.

This fuzzy fly is a bumblebee mimic. Sometimes called a bumblebee plumehorn ('plumehorn' for its feathery antennae) the female lays her eggs in bumblebee or wasp nests. When the fly larvae hatch, they dine on nest debris and sometimes the host's own larvae. Not very nice guests!