

## What the Heck Do Bees Wear, Anyway?

By Irv Sternberg

When Joan assigned our writing group the topic of “Beware”, my first reaction was one of puzzlement. I’d never heard of “bee wear.” As a child I knew that my mother had a set of special *dinner* wear she brought out whenever we had company. When I started reading newspapers, I noticed that department stores often advertised *spring wear, summer wear, fall wear* and *winter wear*. As a teenager with raging hormones, I eagerly studied the shapely young women modeling *swim wear* in the morning newspaper. I even had some limited knowledge of *cruise wear* and, in my early adult years when I looked forward to late-hour activities, I gained some familiarity with *evening wear*.

But I had no idea what bees wore.

So I launched a feverish search by seeking stores that sold bee wear. The newspaper ads were of no help, nor were the Yellow Pages. Alas, even that esteemed repository of All Knowledge—the Internet—failed to enlighten me.

Desperate to educate myself—and fearing Joan’s Royal Wrath should I stumble over her assigned subject, I set out to discover exactly what it was that bees wore—or if they wore anything at all. This was no easy task. There are about 20,000 species of bees in the world, 4,000 of them in North America alone. I made a short list of the most well-known. This is where the Internet, specifically Google and Wikipedia, finally came to my aid.

This scholarly research informed me that bees are flying insects that are closely related to wasps and ants, and may be found on every continent save Antarctica. Realizing I was close to finding the answers in my quest, I zeroed in on the most common species: the honey bee, the bumble bee, the carpenter bee and the sweat bee, and began studying how these bees were adorned.

The honey bee, I learned, wears a golden yellow coat with brown bands, and will sting humans.

The bumble bee has only one coat—dark brown or black with yellow bands.

The carpenter bee has a more diverse wardrobe ranging from greenish black to metallic blue, all with a glossy tint.

The sweat bee has a metallic shade of green, blue or bronze and loves to lick the sweat off your body but is otherwise harmless.

In fact, most bees don’t sting, except for the honey bee which is very protective of its prized product, honey. Defending their sweet, sticky confection is what makes them so aggressive.

I also learned about the physiology of bees—that they have branched, or plume-like bristles; that they have combs on their forelegs for cleaning their antennae; and that females have a dorsal abdominal plate that is divided into two half-plates, but I have no idea why and I have no intention to find out because, with this discovery, I realized my research had gone too far.

Moreover, another thought occurred to me. When Joan chose this topic, she must have meant Beware—as in beware that you don't misconstrue her meaning.