



WASP STING

CHANCES are, if you live in Tasmania, you have come across a European Wasp recently.

Perhaps one has landed on your lunch in the school yard.

Simon Fearn Collections Officer, Natural Sciences, at the [Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery \(QVMAG\)](#), in Launceston, was mad about bugs when he was a child, so it is awesome that his passion has become his job.

Mr Fearn is particularly interested in wasps.

Did you know many species of

spread throughout the state.

The European wasp is sometimes confused with the English or Common Wasp

(*Vespula vulgaris*), which is believed to have arrived in Tasmania in about 1995.

European Wasps are more common and widespread.

Mr Fearn said it is normal to see lots of them at this time of year.

“This is simply because annual nests are at maximum size at this time of year,” he said.

“Each nest is started by a queen in spring, after she emerges from winter torpor [hibernation].

“At first the nest is just a few cells with an egg in each.

When these first eggs hatch into larvae the queen has to forage for protein, usually insects and caterpillars, to feed to the larvae.

Shortly, after that the workers take over gathering food, and the queen is left to lay eggs.

At this time of year the workers are searching for protein.

You may have seen how they are attracted to pet food, or barbecue meat.

“During the summer the nest steadily increases in size until it is around the size of a basketball and contains 6-8000 workers by autumn,” Mr Fearn said.

Mr Fearn said at this time of year, hungry young drones and queens are produced in the nest and have to be fed by workers.

They head out in search of sugary liquids, which is why they are attracted to soft drinks or jam on scones.

“Worker wasps can scent food odours on the air with their antennae,” Mr Fearn said.

“As soon as you open up your lunch box, a trail of yummy scents blows downwind .”



Is the wasp, left, a European Wasp, or a different kind?

How can you tell a European Wasp from other species?

You could research the answer online, at the library, or by visiting QVMAG.

You might like to present your findings in a creative way.

Children’s University Tasmania members can earn stamps in their passports for this challenge, at the discretion of their school coordinator.



PAPER HOME: Simon Fearn with an example of a nest. This one was found in a shed.

wasps make their nests from paper?

European Wasps scrape a thin layer of wood off weathered timber, such as old fences, and then mix it with water to form a slurry.

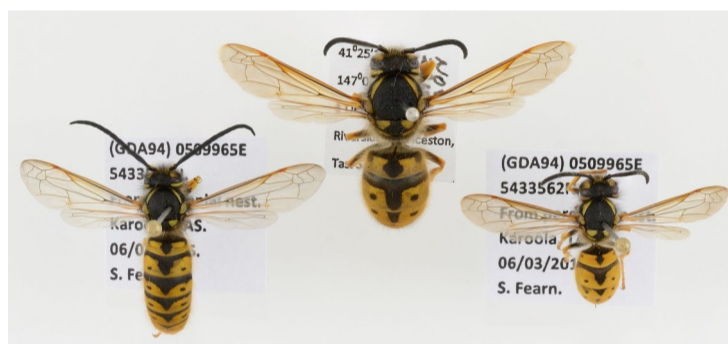
Mr Fearn said this is pretty much the same way people make paper.

“Social insects invented paper millions of years before humans evolved,” he said.

Tasmania has several thousand species of native wasps.

But, as their name suggests, European Wasps, also called German Wasps (*Vespula germanica*) are not among them.

They are native to the Northern Hemisphere, and were introduced to Tasmania by accident in 1959, when hibernating queens arrived in freight. It didn’t take them long to



EXHIBITS: A drone, queen and worker European Wasp, from left; and a view of hibernating queens inside a large eucalypt tree, above right. IMAGES: David Maynard, QVMAG



European Wasp colonies generally die off in early winter due to cold, wet weather, and only the young queens, who find a dry place to hibernate, survive this time of the year, before starting new colonies in the spring.

But because European wasps are native to the cooler regions of the Northern Hemisphere, the milder winters in Australia and New Zealand can allow nests to survive winter and rapidly expand in size in a second season.

Mr Fearn excavated a world-record size nest in 2015, on a farm at Karoola, near Launceston.

The two-year-old nest was 1.1 metres tall, 1.28 long and 1.22m wide, and weighed about 90kg.

It is on permanent display at QVMAG, which is a Children’s University Tasmania learning destination.

European Wasps will attack if their nests are threatened, and unlike bees, they can sting multiple times.

Box the CRABS

A game for two players. You will need a different coloured pen or pencil each. The aim of the game is to make squares while trying to stop your opponent from doing the same. Starting wherever you like, take it in turns to draw a line between two dots. Each time one of you draws a line that completes a square write the first letter of your name in it (these are worth one point each) and have another go. A box around Clarence the Crab is worth five points. The player with the most points at the end of the game wins . . . Good luck!

