

Cuckoo Bee

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cleptoparasite

Cuckoo Bees - *Nomada* spp.

Genus: *Nomada* Family: *Apidae*

Slender with wasp like characteristics

Mostly black or red; yellow and white marks

3-15 mm long

Approximately 290 species in the U.S.

Cuckoo bees in the *Nomada* family are generally slender with very little hair; they also lack pollen carrying structures. They are often confused with wasps and other insects, but when placed under magnification one can see the tiny hairs on their faces.

They do visit flowers to collect nectar for food for themselves, mainly to keep up their energy to look for host nests. Cuckoo bees do not need to collect pollen for nests as their young will feed off of the pollen placed in the nest by the host bee.

Cuckoo bees are a little like cuckoo birds; they too lay their eggs in the nests of others. This practice is called cleptoparasitism. Female Cuckoo bees find the nests of other bees by smell; the male Cuckoo bee helps the females find these nests by releasing special scents near other bee's nests.

Cuckoo bees generally lay more eggs in the nest than the host bee, and the young cuckoo bee's larva eats all of the food which was stored in the nest by the host bee. This and the aggressive behavior of the young cuckoo bee results in death of the host bee offspring.

Nomada Cuckoo bees are just one of the many Cuckoo bees in bee families, some of the others are *Sphecodes*, *Coelioxys*, and *Stelis*. Some of the other types of Cuckoo bees such as the *Stelis* will return many times to the same host bee nest and keep laying eggs in each cell as the host bee builds them.

The *Coelioxys* Cuckoo bee larvae, like other Cuckoo bee larvae, have large mandibles that they use to kill the host bee larva or egg.

