

# Bee or wasp?

It can sometimes be tricky to know if a specimen is a bee or in fact a wasp. Many bees, such as the hylaeine and euryglossine bees, can look similar to wasps, and so can easily be mistaken for wasps, or vice versa. There is, however, one character that separates all bees from all wasps: the presence of branched or plumose hairs in bees, which are absent in wasps. Wasps have only simple hairs on their bodies. In many bees it can be very easy to find some branched hairs (such as scopal hairs), however, in some relatively hairless species it can be difficult. In relatively hairless bees, the best place to look for branched hairs is on the pronotal lobes, or the propodeum. Keep in mind that on some relatively hairless bees, hairs may be tiny, and their branches may be even more tiny, so it is not always easy to determine a branched hair from a simple hair. You will need a microscope with a high-powered zoom in such cases.

## Examples of branched or plumose hairs



Unfortunately, apart from the presence of branched hairs, there are no easy, generalisable rules for identifying all bees from all wasps. Some wasps have an obviously sharp, pointy end of the metasoma, but so too do a few bees. Some wasps have strong indentation on the inner margin of the eyes, adjacent to the antennal socket, but a small number of bees also have such indentation (although this is much less pronounced in such bees). In one group of wasps, the vespids, the forewing is folded along its entire length. Such a trait is not seen in any bees.

As you gain more experience you will become more familiar with bee body forms, and the telltale signs of various wasp groups, and become more adept at sorting a bee from a wasp at first glance.