

Natural History Snippets

Brief reports by members based on their observations of nature
Members are invited to submit their photographs and stories to muhudubella@gmail.com for publication

The Stingless Bee *Tetragonula iridipennis* (S: *kanawa*)



Stingless bees, as the name implies, are bees without stings. Three species of these tiny bees are reported from Sri Lanka, one being endemic. The commonest, and widely distributed, species is *T. iridipennis*. I have had a colony of them in my garage for many years, and they have set up little satellite colonies all over my garden, over the years. Bees from one of the smaller colonies are often seen collecting pollen from the white flowers of a water plant in my pond, that is near their nest.



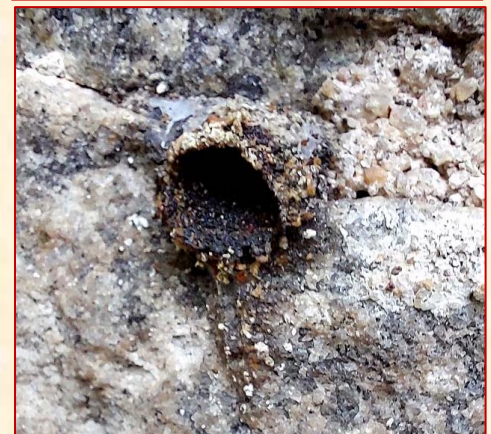
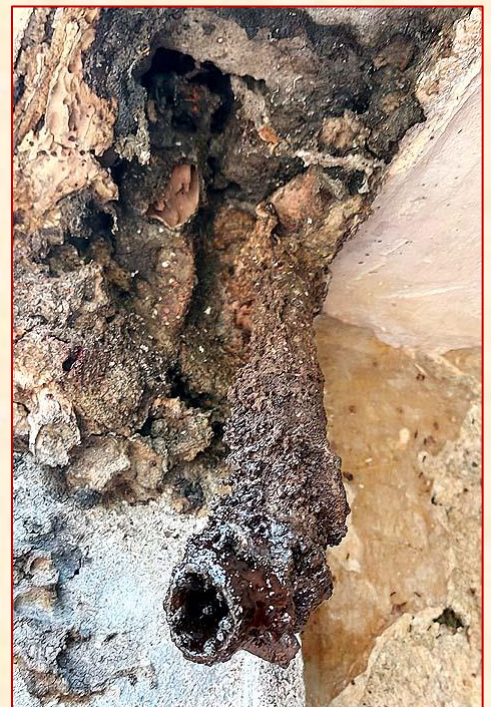
T. iridipennis bees collecting pollen. The pollen is carried by them on the bristles of their last pair of legs.

T. iridipennis builds its nests in crevices of wooden structures, or stone-built walls. The entrance tube is built of soil particles cemented with resin, and characteristically has a circular opening. The resin is a plant exudate; a substance that hardens after a while, and also possesses anti-microbial properties. The entrance tube is smeared with resin to deter invading predators—and often ringed with guard bees to repel boarders, as seen in the images.

Stingless bees produce small quantities of honey that can be collected, and is touted as having medicinal properties.



The oldest nest in my garden is attached to a crevice in a wooden door post. The entrance tube has elongated over the years and is now 15 cm long and 2 cm in diameter. Satellite nests have been built in numerous crevices in stone walls.



Entrance tube of a satellite nest

Silva, T.H.S.E., Diyes, G.C.P., Karunaratne, W.A.I.P., Edirisinghe, J.P. Rediscovery of *Tetragonula praeterita* after 1860: an unremarked common stingless bee endemic to Sri Lanka. *J. Natn. Sci. Foundation of Sri Lanka*, 2018, 46(1): 109-113.

Shanahan, M., Spivak, M. Resin use by stingless bees: A Review. *Insects* 2021, 12, 719. <https://doi.org/10.3390.insects12080719>.

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