

# Differences in Body Colour Expression Between European and Asian Honeybees

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Body colour is an extremely distinctive characteristic among honeybee species and subspecies. Woyke (1977) reviews earlier papers concerning the heredity of body colour in honeybees. The purpose of this investigation was to find the differences in body colour expression between European and Asian honey bees.

## Material and Methods

Honeybees were reared or collected during 25 years in Poland, Germany, India, Afghanistan, Vietnam, China, Thailand and Malaysia (Borneo). Special instrumental crosses of queens and drones were made, or bees originating from natural matings were investigated.

## Results

The gross appearance of the body colour of European honeybees is similar in workers, queens and drones. The Italian bee *A. mellifera ligustica*, has a yellow abdomens with black bands (Fig. 1). The yellow and black colour is the same in all three forms of bees, however, the patterns of the black areas are different. Gene *Y* is responsible for this body-colour expression. Within the same form of

bees, variation in the pattern of the black area occurs. The variation is caused by several modifiers, to expression of the major body colour gene *Y*.

Workers, queens and drones of the black European bees, *A. m. mellifera*, *A. m. carnica* and *A. m. caucasica* are black (Fig. 2). They have small areas of yellow colour on the sides of the abdomina. Gene  $y^{bl}$  is responsible for this body colour expression. The pattern on the abdomen varies. Modifiers of the major body colour gene  $y^{bl}$  are responsible for the variation.

A cross between yellow Italian queen (gene *Y/Y*) and black European drone (gene  $y^{bl}$ ) results in yellow hybrid workers ( $Y/y^{bl}$ ). This occurs because yellow colour is dominant over black. The hybrid queens ( $Y/y^{bl}$ ), produce two types of body coloured drones; yellow and black. Wide variation in the colour pattern occurs, ranging from yellow to black. Two peaks of frequency distribution appear, one within the yellow range, and the other within the black one. This occurs because the two major body-colour genes *Y* and  $y^{bl}$  are modified by several modifiers (Woyke 1977).

The Asian *A. florea* queens and workers are yellow banded, and the drones are black (Fig. 3). The gene responsible for body colour

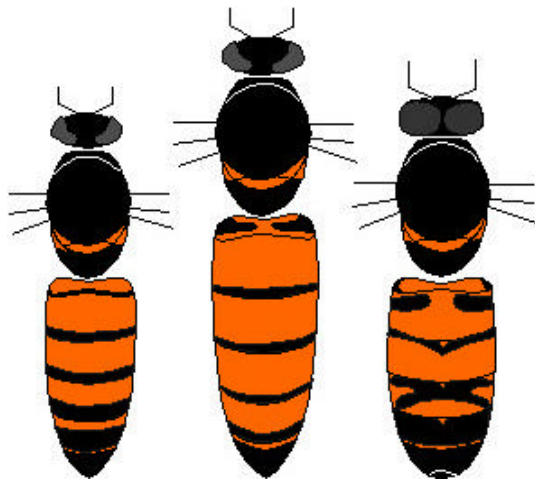


Fig. 1. Body colour patterns in *Apis mellifera ligustica*.

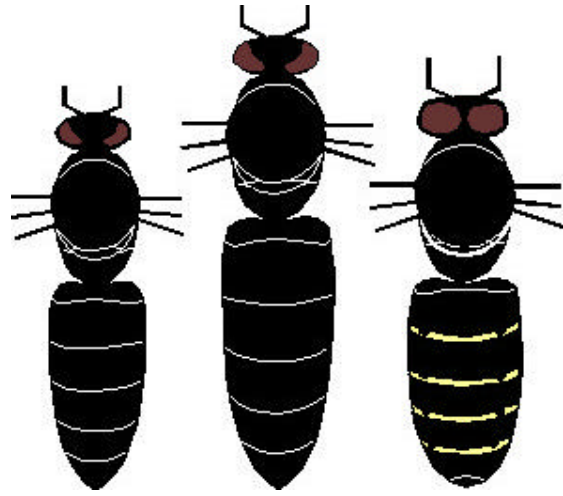


Fig. 2. Body colour patterns in *Apis mellifera mellifera*.

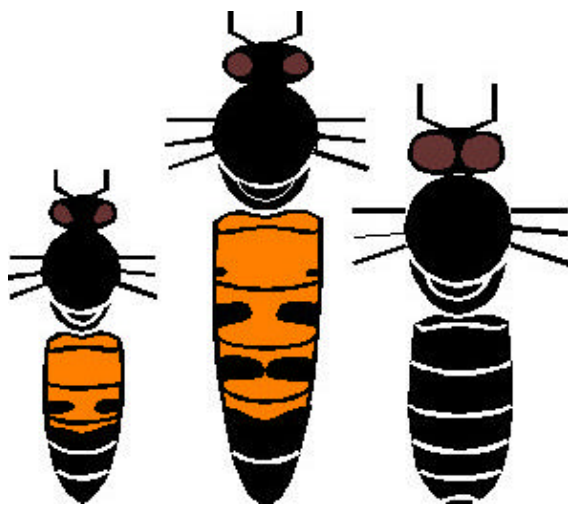


Fig. 3. Body-colour patterns in *Apis florea*.

expression in *A. florea* is designed as *Fl*. Yellow queen produces black drones. A cross of yellow queen with black drone results in yellow workers. Drones produced by yellow laying workers are also black. Thus, the expression of the *Fl* body

colour gene depends upon the sex - females (queens and workers) are of the yellow type and males are black. However, the pattern of black and yellow colour is different in queens and workers. The queen has larger yellow areas than the workers have. Thus, the expression of the patterns of body colour in the same sex depends upon their sexuality.

*A. andreniformis* workers are of the yellow type, although they are the darkest of all 5 Asian honeybees species described here. Queens and drones are black (Fig. 4). A cross between black queen with black drones results in yellow type workers. Thus the expression of body colour is linked to the sexuality. Infertile workers are yellow banded, and the sexes (queens and drones) are black.

*A. dorsata* workers are yellow and queens and drones are of the brown type (Fig. 5). The thoraces of queens and drones are dark brown. The scutellum is brown. The abdominal segments are light brown, with darker brown areas or bands. The gene governing the body colour in *A. dorsata* is designed as *Do*. Crossing a brown queen with a

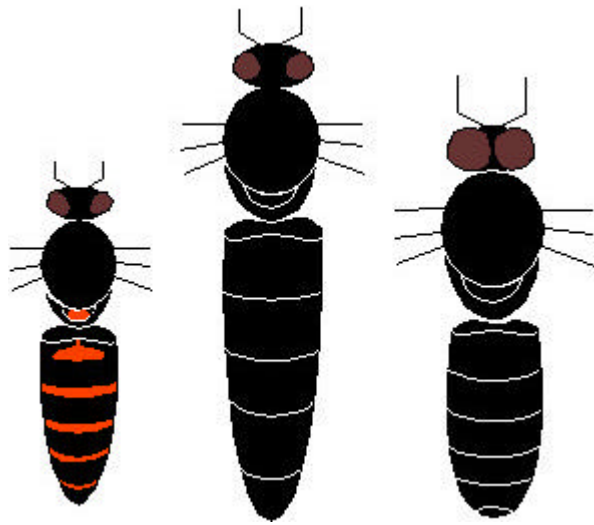


Fig. 4. Body colour patterns in *Apis andreniformis*.

brown drone results in yellow worker type. Thus the expression of body colour in *A. dorsata* depends upon the sexuality of the bees. Infertile workers are of the yellow type and the sexuals (queens and drones) are brown.

*A. cerana* workers are yellow, and queens and drones of the brownish-black type (Fig. 6). The gene responsible for the expression of body colour type in *A. cerana* is designed as *Ce*. A cross between brownish-black queen and brownish-black drones results in yellow worker type. Diploid drones reared by Woyke in 1974 in India were also of the brownish-black type, like the haploids. Thus the expression of the body colour type in *A. cerana* depends upon the sexuality of the bees. Workers are of the yellow type and the sexuals (queens and drones, independently haploid or diploid) are brownish-black.

All three adult forms of *A. koschevnikovi* are dark brown banded. However, the light abdominal bands are light orange in workers and light brown in queens and drones. The gene responsible for the expression of body colour type in *A. koschevnikovi* is designed as *Ko*. A cross between brown, dark banded queen with brown, dark banded drones results in orange,

dark banded workers. So, the body colour expression is linked to the sexuality.

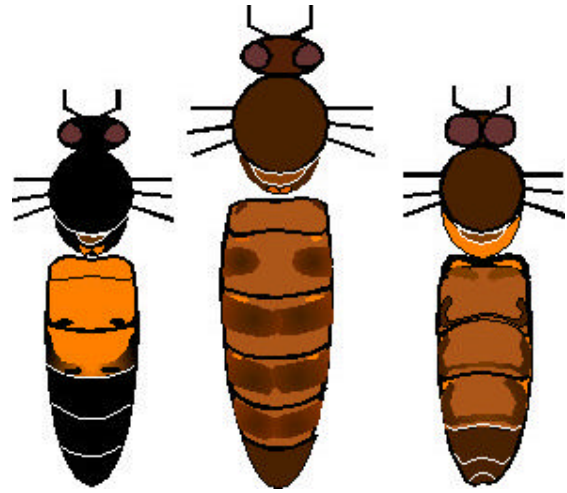


Fig. 5. Body colour patterns in *Apis dorsata*.

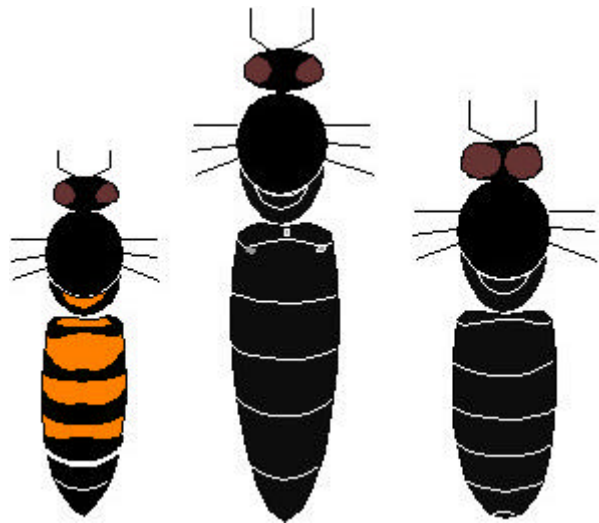


Fig. 6. Body colour patterns in *Apis cerana*.

Thus two main types of body colour expression were found. In European bees workers, queens and drones of the same

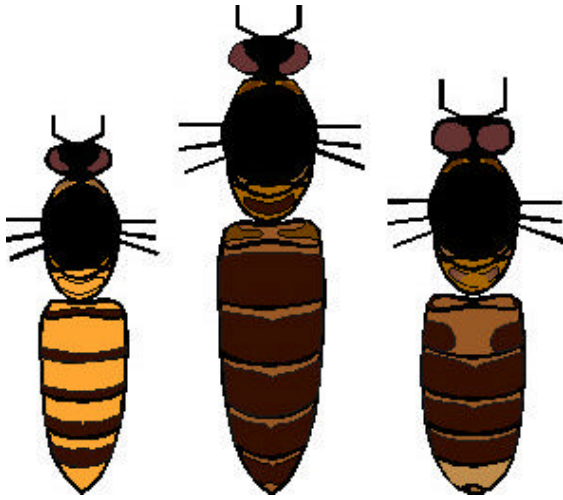


Fig. 7. Body colour patterns in *Apis koschevnikovi*.

subspecies are of the same colour - black or yellow banded. In Asian bees, workers, queens, and drones of the same species are differently coloured. The colour is linked either to sex or to sexuality.

### References

- Woyke, J 1977. The heredity of colour patterns in the honey bee. Genetics, Selection and Reproduction of the Honey Bee. Symp. on Bee Biology in Moscow, Apimondia Publ. House, Bucharest : 49-55.

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# Asian Bees and Beekeeping

Progres of Research and Development

**Proceedings of Fourth Asian Apicultural Association  
International Conference, Katmandu,  
March 23-28, 1998**

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New Delhi

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