

Name _____

Panda Ants

Is it a wasp or is it an ant? Meet the panda ant—a wasp that looks like a hairy ant! The black and white panda ant is so named due to its appearance. It is covered with coarse, short hair. Panda ants are part of a much larger family of wasps known as “velvet ants.” Females in this wasp family do not have wings, however, which makes them look more like ants. Some species make their home in arid areas of the southern and western United States. The panda ant, however, is found specifically in Chile.

Young velvet ants are parasites, feeding on the mature larvae and pupae of other species. They have an unusually tough exoskeleton, which likely helps them invade the nests of their prey. Although only the

female is capable of inflicting a sting, they are known to be quite painful. This powerful sting has earned them the name “cow killer.”

We often associate wasps with their stings. Wasps also bring to mind colonies of angry insects. However, they are more beneficial to humans than harmful. They prey on other insects we consider pests. However, many species, including the panda ant, are solitary. Solitary wasps use their sting to hunt rather than for defense.

Very little is known about this particular species of wasp. Other related species have been observed and studied in the United States. Scientists want to learn more about any harmful effects and benefits to people.

Text Questions

- What does the word *parasites* mean as it is used in the second paragraph?
 - animals that live in multiple locations
 - people who live at the expense of others without paying
 - animals that live on an organism from which they receive nourishment
 - animals that spread bacteria to other organisms
- What can you infer about this insect from its name?
 - It lives in China.
 - Its black and white color resembles a panda bear.
 - It is an ant that eats bamboo leaves.
 - It has a lot of fur.
- Based on the text, how do solitary wasps differ from social wasps?
 - They are never seen around people.
 - They sting to defend themselves.
 - Their sting is used to hunt.
 - They do not build nests.
- What organizational structure does the author use to help the reader understand the information?
 - compare and contrast
 - sequential
 - problem and solution
 - cause and effect
- Why might farmers place wasps near crops?
