

Conservation House
PO Box 10420
Wellington 6140
doc.govt.nz
Ref: OIAD-8178

11 June 2026

Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Thank you for your request to the Department of Conservation, received on 02 June 2026, in which you asked for:

Hi, I'm wondering about exactly how many native bee species there are currently, and how much their numbers have declined/increased over winter from 2023-2026. I'm also wanting to know how their numbers differ from the introduced honeybee species.

Any information will be greatly appreciated.

We have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982.

Your questions and our responses are listed below:

"Hi, I'm wondering about exactly how many native bee species there are currently, and how much their numbers have declined/increased over winter from 2023-2026. I'm also wanting to know how their numbers differ from the introduced honeybee species. Any information will be greatly appreciated"

Number of native bee species

There are 28 species of bee native to Aotearoa / NZ. Twenty-seven of those species are endemic (that is, they evolved here and aren't found elsewhere). All New Zealand native bees belong to two families *Colletidae* and *Halictidae*.

Leioproctus 'Digger bees'. 18 species, up to 12mm. These are the largest native bee and collect pollen in their 'corbicula' sacs on their hind legs. They are semi-social where they dig tunnels into a range of substrates including clay banks or dry sandy soils. They are important pollinators of small native flowers. They rarely sting with weak effect.

Hylaeus 'Masked bees' 6 species, bees about 8mm long. Small, shiny and black. Hairless. Live in dead wood, pollen collected internally – ingested.

Lasioglossum 'sweat bees' (family Halictidae) smallest at 4-8mm. Nest in soil, *L. sordidum* is quite common even in modified habitats.

Ecological threats and issues

Honeybees (*Apis mellifera*) compete directly with native bees for nectar and pollen, especially on native flowers (e.g. Mānuka, Kānuka, Hebe/Veronica spp.). The most significant threat to

native bees is habitat loss and vegetation change via plant and animal invasion together with climate impacts. Locally, pesticides may also have an impact.

Have native bees declined or increased over winter from 2023-2026?

There is no national survey for any of the 28 native bee species. The best data available are records constantly posted by experts and the public on the New Zealand iNaturalist platform. Searching *Colletidae* and *Halictidae* on New Zealand iNaturalist ([A Community for Naturalists · iNaturalist NZ](#)) will return a lot of information. Relevant are the graphs by year (History Tab) for the two native bee families:

- [Plasterer Bees \(Family Colletidae\)](#)
- [Sweat Bees \(Family Halictidae\)](#)

This shows records are seasonal but much the same from 2023 to the present for bee species in the *Colletidae* family. In the *Halictidae* family, there are fewer records and it is less reliable data. Tentatively it shows few records from last year. This may be because an expert was not reporting observations or it may be another reason.

How do native bee numbers differ from introduced honeybee numbers?

You can think of honeybees being managed like the way sheep are managed in New Zealand. Honeybees are more widely distributed in New Zealand than any one species of native bee. They occur in far greater numbers than all native bee species combined. However, a comparison of numbers is not ecologically meaningful. This is for several reasons. One reason is that honeybees occur in hives with one hive having thousands of individuals. They are described as 'eusocial' in the family *Apidae*. Native bees are in different families and have a different social organisation. One colony is not in a single hive, and the entire colony would naturally have (at most) a few hundred individuals.

In addition to New Zealand iNaturalist, there are many good resources for information about New Zealand's native bees here:

[Native Bees — For The Love of Bees](#)

[New Zealand's native bees – quiet lives of desperation | Te Papa's Blog](#)

[Native bees | Te Ara Encyclopedia of New Zealand](#)

Science publication summarising technical information on all native and introduced bees in New Zealand: [\(Insecta: Hymenoptera\). Fauna of New Zealand 57, 295 pp. Donovan, B. J. 2007. View of Forty-one species: A current count of indigenous and exotic bee species in Aotearoa - New Zealand.](#)

Please note that this letter (with your personal details removed) may be published on the Department's website.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Hilary Aikman".

Hilary Aikman
Director Terrestrial Biodiversity (Acting)
Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai