



Scientific Name:

Apis mellifera ruttneri

English:

Maltese honeybee

Maltese:

in-naħla ta' Malta

The Maltese honeybee is a unique subspecies that evolved due to geographic isolation and is found only in the Maltese Islands. At just 14mm long, it is smaller and darker than other honeybees, with shorter wings perfectly adapted for flying in windy conditions. These bees live in large colonies, which consist of a queen, sterile female workers, and male drones.

Adapted to Malta's hot, dry climate, the Maltese honeybee can find food and water even during the dry period from April to September, and it typically rears brood throughout the year. Additionally, it is more resistant to diseases and parasites than other honeybee species and exhibits a natural defence against local predatory wasps, a behaviour lacking in imported Italian bee stocks. These traits make the Maltese honeybee an efficient honey producer, even in harsh conditions.

Ecologically, the Maltese honeybee is vital to pollinating local plants, ensuring biodiversity, and supporting agriculture. Beekeeping on the islands dates back to at least the Phoenicians, and Malta has long been famous for its honey, valued for its unique taste and health benefits. In fact, the island's name may have originated from the Greek word "*meli*," meaning honey. Historical sites, such as Mġiebaħ, l/o Mellieħa ("*mġiebaħ*" being the Maltese name for beehives) and ancient beehives found in different parts of the islands, reflect the importance of beekeeping throughout the ages.

Efforts to conserve the Maltese honeybee are essential for sustainable beekeeping. In recognition of its importance, a commemorative €2 coin was recently also issued to honour this unique species and raise awareness of the need for its preservation. Furthermore, in September 2024, the Maltese honeybee was officially declared Malta's national insect, granting it a higher level of legal protection to safeguard its future.

