Plant common name: **Ivy**

Latin name: *Hedera helix*

Common family name: Ivy

Scientific family name: **Araliaceae**

Plant height: creeps along the ground and climbs tall trees

Flowering period: varies across UK. Nairnshire, early October-November

Provides: pollen and copious nectar

Utilised by: *Colletes hederae* (Solitary bee) honey bees, wasps, flies, hover flies and ants

Honey: yes, greenish in colour and reported to be pleasantly aromatic and is quick to granulate

**Ivy**

This British climbing plant, sometimes known as common, Atlantic, or English ivy, thrives clinging to tree trunks in woodlands where the soil is not acidic. It clutches old walls and rocks and also acts as ground cover, creeping over land as an immature plant searching for something to climb. Ivy has its own root system so cannot be accused of parasitism.

*Hedera helix* is one of two ivy species found in the UK. The other is Irish ivy, *Hedera hibernica,* which is so similar that they can only be told apart by the hairs below the flowers which are white in *H*. *helix*, and yellow-green or yellow-brown in colour in *H*. *hibernica.*

The small greenish yellow flowers are malodourous attracting carrion flies. However, many other pollinators are attracted to its high levels of concentrated nectar making ivy an important autumn flowering plant. Flowering times vary across the country but where I live in the Scottish Highlands it usually flowers from early October till November.

The nectaries are situated in the pistil with nectar being secreted by a yellow-green disc surrounding the styles. Nectar flows copiously and I’ve seen crusty sugary crystals covered by small flies, hover flies, ants and wasps. Not only does ivy provide late forage for honey bees, but it gives the solitary ivy bee-*Colletes Hederae*-all its pollen requirements. The latter, a newcomer to the UK, was found in 2001 in Dorset, and it is heading north having been spotted in Shropshire and Wales. Because the nectar is so concentrated it requires less work for honeybees to evaporate excess water so is an ideal late crop for winter storage. Ivy honey is greenish in colour with an aromatic flavour and granulates quickly due to high glucose content.

Ivy pollen is a dull yellow colour with medium sized individual grains of between 35-50µm. Like many pollen grains, ivy has 3 apertures on the exine which allow the grains to dry out or to absorb water. However, the key function is providing an exit for the germinating pollen tube carrying the reproductive cells from the pollen grain to the ovule. These apertures are covered by a thin membrane designed to rupture under pressure when the pollen tube bursts through.

The leaves of immature non-flowering ivy are dark green matt and heart shaped with five lobes. They creep along the ground searching for something to climb where they will mature and flower. The leaves then become a lighter shiny green and more oval shaped with a pointed end. Leaf size varies—see drawing of correctly scaled leaves.

Beekeepers need to be aware that if Asian hornets-*Vespa Velutina-* make an incursion into their area they are likely to be found on ivy craving sugar at end of summer so monitoring local ivy should be part of our regular surveillance routine.

**Pollen** under the microscope (x 400 magnification)

Colour: dull yellow

Shape: triangular and round

Size: medium sized grains, 35-50µm

Exine features: medium with beaded or spaced rods

Surface: net

Number of apertures: 3

Aperture type/furrows: 3 pointed furrows seen

Other features: none noted