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The Incredible Life Cycle of a Bumblebee

The life cycle of a bumblebee is an amazing journey that begins with a single queen. Each stage of the bumblebee's life cycle is important for the survival of the colony and the species.

The life of a bumblebee begins when the queen lays eggs in her nest during the spring. These eggs hatch in about 4 to 5 days, turning into tiny, white larvae. The queen feeds the larvae a diet of pollen and nectar that she collects. Over the next two weeks, the larvae grow larger and then spin cocoons around themselves. Inside these cocoons, they undergo a transformation called metamorphosis. After about two more weeks, the adult bumblebees emerge.

The first adult bees to hatch are usually female workers. They take over many of the queen's duties, such as gathering food and caring for new larvae. This allows the queen to focus on laying more eggs. As the summer progresses, the colony grows, reaching its largest size—about 50 to 500 bees, depending on the species.

Toward the end of summer, the queen lays special eggs that develop into new queens and male bumblebees, called drones. The drones leave the nest to find queens from other colonies to mate with. The new queens also leave the nest to prepare for hibernation. They find safe places to spend the winter, such as under leaves or in the soil. The original colony, including the old queen, dies out in the fall as temperatures drop.

Bumblebees live for different lengths of time, depending on their role. Worker bees live about 2 to 6 weeks, while drones live only a few weeks. Queens live the longest, surviving up to one year because they hibernate during the winter.

The bumblebee's life cycle—egg, larva, pupa, and adult—shows how nature ensures the survival of these hardworking insects. Each stage has a purpose, helping the colony thrive and prepare for the next generation.