

Bug-of-the-Month

By Sue Hakala

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Digger Bee

Diadasia rinconis

Before sunrise this summer, look closely at the flowers in your yard and you may find digger bees sleeping in them. As *Diadasia rinconis* is awakened by the warming sun, they yawn and stretch their tiny bee legs preparing for a full day of gathering pollen nectar as food for themselves and their eggs.

One female began digging her nursery tunnel next to a soon-to-bloom *Rebutia* in my yard. Her strong forelegs moved aside the ¼ inch plus granite rock, and one small foot full at a time, began to dig. As she slowly proceeded underground, she'd back up racking the dirt up under her body. Now and then, she'd use her body to tap, tap, tap the pencil-size tunnel walls firming them up, then, lined them with a wax-like secretion. A frantic 24-hours of activity created a small dirt mound, and what looked like two different tunnels moving off in opposite directions.

Each one of the underground cells she'll create will contain a pollen/nectar ball serving as food for the one egg she'll place on it. The developing larvae will wait in a kind of suspended animation and will not finish developing until next spring when cactus flowers begin to bloom again. Males emerge first, searching for females, and may even dig underground to find them.

Sometimes digger bees will nest in big aggregation sites by the hundreds or, like my girl, by herself. They are excellent cactus pollinators, visiting flowers many times. If you look closely in your flower, you can see the pollen sacks on their back legs heavily laden, and their bodies utterly dusted with pollen. It's okay to get close to them, as they only sting if handled or threatened.

Digger bees seldom nest in the same place again. Research is showing that digger bees specialize on plants that are abundant, bloom predictably and reliably with large amounts of pollen. Watch for them sleeping in your cholla, ferocactus and datura flowers among others over the summer. Wait patiently to see that tiny little yawn and stretch—it'll give you a thrill.

To see more photos, go to <http://calphotos.berkeley.edu>, animals, and type in *Diadasia rinconis*.