

CUCKOO SWEAT BEE

(*Sphecodes spp.*)

Bug of the Month



Also known as blood bees due to their abdomens' bright red coloration, *Sphecodes* bees are common parasites of sweat bees (*Halictidae*). They are found worldwide, except in Australia, and are active in the spring through early fall.

Like other cleptoparasites, their bodies are heavily sculpted and lack pollen collecting hairs. Most

cleptoparasitic bees lay their eggs in the host nest and leave their larvae to destroy the host egg. *Sphecodes* bees differ from this behavior. Instead, the *Sphecodes* female will enter the host nest and kill existing eggs before replacing it with her own.

Some species of *Sphecodes* bees can be found living alongside their hosts in the nest. Many of

their host bees exhibit a form of sociality; meaning nest members cooperate to build and prepare nest cells for their offspring. Finding *Sphecodes* bees living in the nest suggests these species may also be social parasites capable of taking over the role of "queen" and continuously laying eggs in the host's place.

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