

# Meet Rita the Reed Bee;

## Australian Pollinator Week's mascot



Rita the 'reed bee' is **indigenous** to Australia and could be any one of the 80 or so bee species within the genus *Exoneura*.

Rita is not a social bee, like honey bees and stingless bees. She is a **semi-social** (allodapine) bee who progressively feeds her young in a small, open brood chamber.

Rita **doesn't make honey**, but she is a very important pollinator. She carries **dry pollen** in special (scopal) hairs, on her back legs.



Rita **nects in the dead stems** of both native and exotic plants. She can excavate the pithy centre of weedy plants such as Lantana, Blackberry and Raspberry, or simply nest in the hollows of reeds or rushes.



She only collects enough nectar and pollen to feed a few offspring at a time. Her babies are **bee grubs**.



Tobias Smith

Rita and her daughters **overwinter** in their nest and, if the weather is warm enough, they may be seen foraging for nectar on warm winter days.



Rita has morphological characteristics that define her as a reed bee, but she also has a distinguished personality, befitting her role of mascot for Australian Pollinator Week.



The last **three metasomal segments**, of her red/brown abdomen, are flattened. She uses these to **defend** her nest against ants and spiders, by blocking off the entrance with her 'bottom'.

She has distinctive yellow markings on her **clypeus** (forehead), made more distinguished by her gorgeous pompadour.

Her **black thorax** is pinched at the 'waist' with an elegant belt and her gold choker highlights her neck.

No shaving for this little girl, as she needs those **hairy legs** to carry pollen back to her nest to feed her babies.



To find out more about Australian Pollinator Week visit the website at <http://beesbusiness.com.au/pollweekmain.html>