

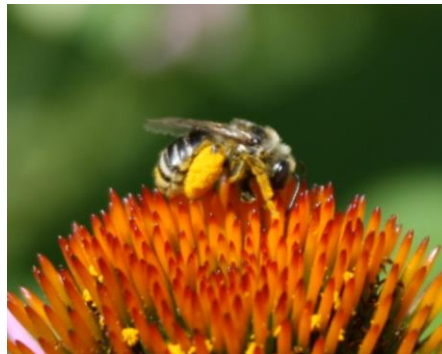
Basic Bee ID

IDENTIFYING BEES

Identifying bees can be very difficult. Approximately 400 bee species live in Minnesota and not all look like the big, fuzzy bumble bees that we're most familiar with. In addition to the incredible diversity in the size, color, and shape of different bee species, many other insects share common characteristics. Still other insects try to mimic bees' coloration to protect them from predators.

BEES

To know if you have found a bee, look for long elbowed antennae, 2 pairs of wings, eyes on the sides of their heads, and fuzz or other hairs to collect pollen. The pollen could be stored loosely on hairs on the bees' legs or abdomen or rolled in a compact ball and stored in pollen "baskets" on the bees' hind legs. If you are watching a bee eating nectar, you may see their long tongue reaching down into the flower.



Clockwise from upper left.
Photo 1: Long antennae, tongue, eyes on side of head
Photo 2: Pollen-collecting hairs on legs
Photo 3: Pollen stored in pollen baskets on a bumble bee
Photo 4: 2 pairs of wings (4 total)



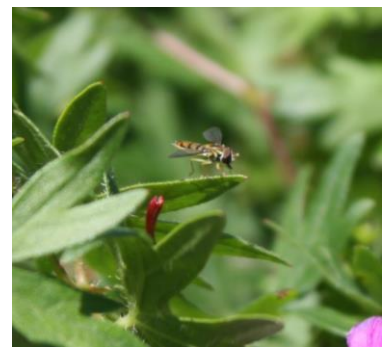
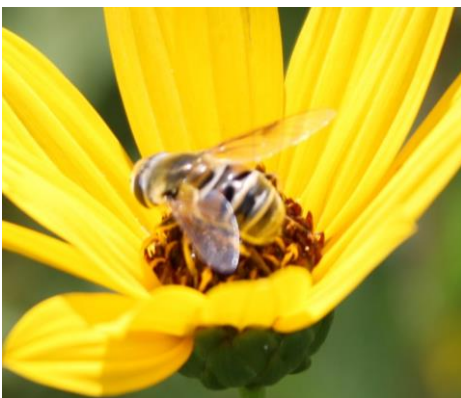
WASPS

Wasps are closely related to bees and share many similar characteristics. Like bees, they have two pairs of wings and long, elbowed antennae. However, wasps lack the hairs that bees have to collect pollen. Their bodies are generally long and slender and they may have long legs that dangle as they fly. Not all wasps are social or aggressive and many provide important ecosystem services by preying on caterpillars and other pests.



FLIES

Several different families of flies mimic bees with their coloring. However, when you look more closely, you will start to notice the different characteristics. Unusual in insects, flies have only one pair of wings. They generally have shorter antennae that arise from the middle of their heads. Most flies have large eyes that are oriented towards the top of their heads. They may look fuzzy like bees but their bodies are more robust and they do not carry pollen to provision their nests.



L-R Photo 1: 1 pair of wings, robust body, Photo 2: Large eyes towards top of head and small antennae, Photo 3: Hover fly or flower fly