

Warning, some photos may cause Creepy Crawlies or Heeby Jeebies

This Month's MVB is ... The Yellow Banded Bumble Bee, (*Bombus terricola*)



Honey Bees get so much attention these days, which is amazing they absolutely deserve it! But I would like to shed some light on one of our own native Bee friends, the Yellow Banded Bumble Bee.

You've definitely seen this guy cruising around your yard. They are adorable, friendly, very beneficial and honestly not the smartest. They are only aggressive when they feel threatened, most times when they are buzzing around you they either like the colour of your clothing and want to check for nectar or you may be wearing something that smells good to them. If you remain calm and let them have a smell and they will move on when they find nothing. As always those with allergies should take extra precautions and avoid areas that bees frequent.

In 2015 Environment Canada placed the Yellow Banded Bumble Bee on the slightly concerned list for at risk species. Suspicions were that southern domestic bee colonies were infected with a pathogen that spread to wild Bumbles causing a species decline of 34%. In 2018 they were reassessed to be vulnerable and are still considered as such.

The Yellow Banded Bumble Bee is considered to be a medium sized bee with a unique yellow and black abdominal banding pattern that begins with a band of yellow across the thorax just before the base of the wings, and ends with a brownish-yellow fringe on the fifth section of the abdomen. This pattern can be seen on Queens, Males and workers. Since all sexes and stations have the same pattern the best way to distinguish between them would be to compare sizes as Queens can be up to 2cm in length with Female and Male workers slightly smaller at a max of 1.5cm.



Bombus terreicola (left), *Bombus pensylvanicus* (center) and *Bombus auricomus* (right).

The Yellow banded Bumble Bee is a forage generalist/opportunist meaning they will feed on a great variety of nectar producing plants with no preference to plant species, keeping in mind that bees in general prefer long throated flowers that produce large amounts of nectar. However, compared to other bumble bees the Yellow Banded Bumble Bee has a shorter tongue which can sometimes reduce the options for food sources. Long throated flowers will be harder for them to feed from so they either have to move on to smaller flowers with shorter throats (Alyssum, Verbena, etc.) that require them to work harder to acquire the same volume of nectar the larger flowers would produce, or they can attempt to “nectar-rob”. This involves the bee searching for holes bitten at the base of flowers (made by other insects) that allow their shorter tongues to reach the nectar they desire.

As a habitat generalist they have no specific environmental characteristics necessary for nesting simply having a hollow of some kind, like an abandoned rodent burrow or a decomposing tree on the forest floor, is enough for colony nesting. They can be found in a variety of locations, more commonly they can be found in woodlands as that is where they will find more options for nesting and overwintering, but can also be found in open meadows and even some urban areas. Queens will overwinter in loose soil or under rotting leaves, which is why it is important to leave your fall clean up until later spring or simply move the leaves, try not to bag them up or mulch them as this can harm or even kill the queens. And queens are very important to reproduction and distribution of new colonies.

Much like Honey Bees, their role in our ecosystems is the pick up and distribution of pollen from the various flowers they feed on. You'll often see these guys with a dusting of pollen all over the fuzzy hairs on their body or even some little orange clumps on their hind legs. As they visit each new flower throughout the day they will deposit and/or pick more pollen. Thus aiding our plants by fertilizing the seeds within and stimulating the production of fruits, berries, and some veggies as there are many plants that require cross pollinating in order to produce.



There are a few simple ways you can help your local colony thrive. Planting a variety of native flowering plants can help provide that steady source of pollen they need to travel to other areas of the garden. At Maries West River Greenhouses we carry many perennials including Echinacea, Rudbeckia, Sedum, and even Daisies. Annuals can help too, Snapdragons and Alyssum are known favourites of bees. No Mow May is a good practice to get into, Dandelions are one of the first flowers to emerge in the spring and boy do bees love them! Try to wait until other flowers are in full bloom before removing dandelions from your lawn, they are an essential source of nectar and pollen for emerging queens waking up in the spring. Try to deposit any rotting trees and piles of dead leaves behind buildings or fencing to give them a safe place to colonize and hibernate, even just inside the tree line of your property (if you have access to the tree line) is a good place to make a pile of branches and leaves.

At Maries West River Greenhouses we all appreciate our local beneficials and believe they are ultimately the best form of natural insect control in the garden but we are not experts on the subject. The purpose of these posts is to raise awareness to the fact that not all insects are harmful and we should keep that in mind when applying insecticides for pest control.

Sources:

[Yellow-banded Bumble Bee, *Bombus terricola*](#)

<https://inaturalist-open-data.s3.amazonaws.com/photos/85315174/large.jpeg>

[Yellow-banded Bumble Bee | NWT Species at Risk](#)

[Yellow Banded Bumble Bee | Xerces Society](#)

[Endangered-Species-Week-Yellow-banded-bb.jpg \(5000×2625\)](#)