

BOGDIVERSITY THURSDAY



—*from Head Naturalist Clinton*

Flower Flies

POST #32—June 9, 2022

Today's post is timely, as we will be featuring the species today on a field trip this Saturday! Known by some as sweat bees, this group is better known as the flower flies. A diverse group of insects in behavior, color, shape, and geographic location, the flower flies are much more diverse than you might know!

Flower flies, or hover flies, are a group of true flies in the family Syrphidae. These flies are fairly widespread and quite common, but often overlooked. Sometimes passed off as bees or wasps, these flies are important pollinators. Most adult flower flies eat pollen directly from flowers and sometimes nectar. Their larvae are equally fascinating! Many are aquatic detritivores, some are terrestrial detritivores, and others still prey on other insects. To date, we have documented 40 species of flower fly in the Sax-Zim Bog.

The most striking thing about these flies is their coloration and pattern. These flies employ Batesian Mimicry. This particular type

of mimicry is primarily done by harmless species mimicking harmful species, to avoid predation. Most flower flies either mimic bees or wasps, some to incredible accuracy (see below!). Though they look like some stinging insects, flower flies are completely harmless.

There are couple of easy ways to ID flower flies versus the species they are mimicking. Flies only have 2 wings (one pair), where bees and wasps have 4 wings (two pairs). Flies also have short, stubby antennae. Bees and wasps tend to have longer and slender antennae. The last place to look is the eyes! Flower flies usually have a large, helmet of eyes. Bees and wasps usually have large eyes, but they are usually far apart.

More information on flower flies in the photos below!
(Flower fly photos below by Head Naturalist Clinton)



Look closely... this is not a bee! This is Orange-footed Drone Fly. There are a few convincing bee mimics in the fly world, but this species is quite good.



Some flower flies are hard to ID. This flower fly, in the genus *Syrphus*, is pretty typical of flower flies in color and shape: black and yellow striping, fairly hairless, and fairly small.



This is a pair of Wasp-like Falsehorns! They are one of two or three species in our area that mimic wasps. Falsehorns are fairly large (horsefly sized) and much larger than most flower flies.



On the other end of the size spectrum, the calligraphers are beautiful and tiny! This is Margined Calligrapher, named for the beautiful markings on its abdomen.



Even though there are plenty of black and yellow flower flies, there are a number of black and whiteish flower flies. White-spotted Pond Fly is lovely and deviates from the typical wasp or bee mimicking flower flies.