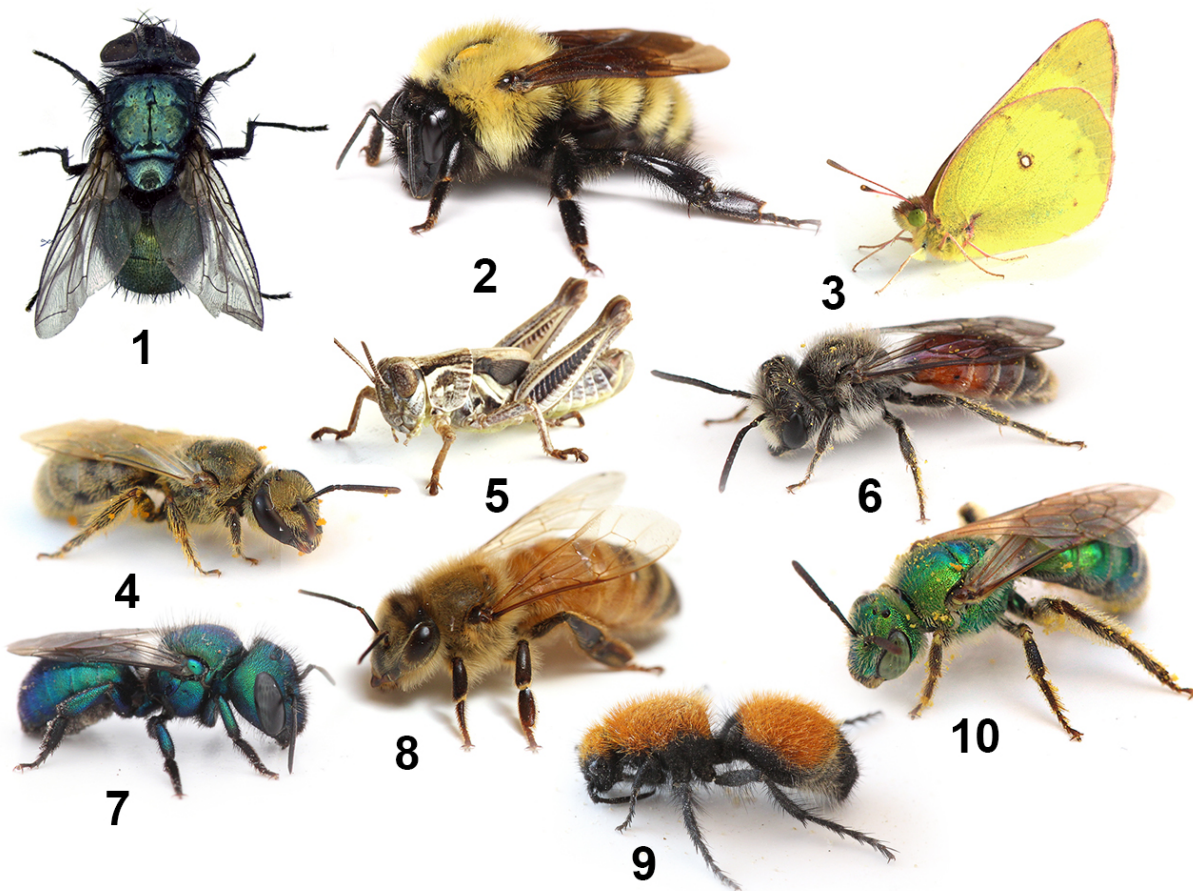


# 'Bee' informed: public interest exceeds understanding in bee conservation, says biologist

September 5 2017, by Mary-Ann Muffoletto

---



Which of these creatures are bees and which aren't? In a recent survey, USU biologist Joseph Wilson found many people couldn't answer this question with certainty. He noted most people knew about bee declines and recognized bees as important pollinators, but they had little knowledge of the wide diversity of bee

species. More public education and understanding is needed, Wilson says, for successful pollinator conservation efforts. Credit: Joseph Wilson, Utah State University

Many people have heard bee populations are declining due to such threats as colony collapse disorder, pesticides and habitat loss. And many understand bees are critical to plant pollination. Yet, according to a study led by Utah State University ecologist Joseph Wilson, few are aware of the wide diversity of bees and other pollinators beyond such species as honeybees.

"The U.S. Postal Service recently released its 'Protect Pollinator' series, which features only the European honeybee and the monarch butterfly," says Wilson, assistant professor of biology at USU's Tooele campus. "A social media commenter observed that using these two species on a campaign to protect [pollinators](#) is akin to focusing on chickens to save birds. It's a pretty good comparison, actually."

Wilson, with colleagues Matthew Forister of the University of Nevada-Reno and USU alum Olivia Messinger Carril '00 MS'06, published findings in the Sept. 5, 2017, online edition of *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*.

"In our recent survey, 99 percent of our respondents said bees are critical or important, yet only 14 percent were able to guess within 1,000, the actual number of [bee species](#) in the United States," he says. "Most people estimated around 50 species of bees, while the correct number is about 4,000 known species."

Further, when shown images of varied insects, many respondents were unable to discern bees from non-bees.

"A challenge with lack of knowledge about bees is you can't protect what you're now aware of," Wilson says. "We could be losing species or causing decline and not even know it."

Public education is key to bolstering conservation efforts, he says.

"Because [conservation efforts](#) require substantial public support, it's important that the public understand bees and what needs to be done to protect these species," Wilson says. "Education and outreach are key to understanding bee declines and protecting our pollinators."

**More information:** Joseph S Wilson et al, Interest exceeds understanding in public support of bee conservation, *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* (2017). [DOI: 10.1002/fee.1531](https://doi.org/10.1002/fee.1531)

Provided by Utah State University

Citation: 'Bee' informed: public interest exceeds understanding in bee conservation, says biologist (2017, September 5) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-09-bee-biologist.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.