

Scientists agree, the media is biased against wasps

April 8 2024



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Wasp scientists around the globe agree that media coverage of wasps

skews negative and almost entirely overlooks their beneficial attributes, reports a team led by UCL researchers.

Based off a survey of 115 wasp and bee researchers spread across six continents, the paper, [published](#) in the peer-reviewed journal *Insectes Sociaux*, found that reporting on wasps is far more negative than for their bee cousins.

The study describes how media coverage of wasps tends to portray wasps as dangerous pests, with scant attention given to their positive attributes as pollinators and pest-controlling predators. But they also say that scientists have an important role in combating this bias against wasps, by engaging with media to facilitate accurate coverage.

Senior author Professor Seirian Sumner (UCL Center for Biodiversity & Environment Research, UCL Biosciences) said, "As many [insect populations](#) are in decline across the globe, there is an urgent need to ramp up [conservation efforts](#). Given how impactful public support can be for conservation, it is vital that the public recognizes the value of all insects as critical components of the environments we live in.

"The media play a major role in shaping public awareness, by shifting attitudes which can contribute to conservation actions—as long as people see a species as worth protecting."

The study authors surveyed researchers about media coverage of their insect of study, including responses from 55 wasp scientists based in 20 countries, alongside 60 bee scientists as a comparative group due to the similarities between the two insects.

The wasp scientists nearly all agreed that the media portrays wasps in a negative or strongly negative light, with only two respondents calling the coverage positive, while the large majority of bee scientists agreed that

bees tend to get positive coverage. They all also agreed that media coverage was reflective of [public opinion](#), as most non-scientists generally feel negatively about wasps, but positively about bees.

Both groups of scientists agreed that the media is important for promoting conversation of the insects they study. And among the scientists who had interacted with the media, even the wasp scientists agreed that the resulting coverage tended to be more positive, and they felt their own contributions positively impacted this.

Lead author Dr. Cintia Oi (UCL Center for Biodiversity & Environment Research) said, "Wasps play very important roles in ecosystems across the world—they're particularly important for agriculture, as they pollinate hundreds of [plant species](#) and can be excellent pest controllers that hunt down aphids and caterpillars that damage crops. But most people don't realize how valuable they are, and just see them as picnic-bothering pests—and then negative media stories reinforce such stereotypes.

"Wasp scientists may be able to turn the dial on portrayal of wasps in the media, by engaging with journalists to help educate the public on the value of this much maligned insect—and hopefully, to drive support for conservation efforts."

More information: C. A. Oi et al, Bee-Ing positive about wasp-negative media reporting: the opinions of scientists and their influence on the media, *Insectes Sociaux* (2024). [DOI: 10.1007/s00040-024-00952-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00040-024-00952-9)

Provided by University College London

Citation: Scientists agree, the media is biased against wasps (2024, April 8) retrieved 16 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-04-scientists-media-biased-wasps.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.