

half-black bumble bee *Bombus vagans*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Arthropoda

Class: Insecta

Order: Hymenoptera

Family: Apidae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

Wings are clear with black veins. Coloration is somewhat variable. Queens and workers have yellow “hair” on the thorax, first two abdominal segments and sides of the thorax. There is a black spot between the wing bases that may be large enough in the workers to reach the wing bases. The remainder of the abdominal segments have black “hair.”

BEHAVIORS

These insects are medium-tongued bees. They nest on or under the surface of the ground. Unlike many bumble bee species, the half-black bumble bee can be found in forests. It is often seen at beardstongues (*Penstemon* spp.), milkweeds (*Asclepias* spp.), asters (*Symphyotrichum* spp.), thistles (*Cirsium* spp.) and thoroughworts (*Eupatorium* spp.). Queens are active from April through October. Workers are active from May through September. Males are active from June through October. These bees are important pollinators of the flowers that they visit to collect nectar and pollen. They are eusocial insects. Their life cycle includes egg, larva, pupa and adult stages. Only the fertilized queen overwinters from a colony. In the spring, she selects a nest site and constructs the nest, which is lined with plant materials. The first brood raised consists of all workers (females). The workers do all the jobs of the hive except egg-laying. Late in the year both males and queens are produced. Males mate with queens in the fall.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

marshes; peatlands; swamps; wet prairies and fens

Woodland Habitats

bottomland forests; southern Illinois lowlands; upland deciduous forests

Prairie and Edge Habitats

black soil prairie; dolomite prairie; edge; gravel prairie; hill prairie; sand prairie; shrub prairie

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