

Suckley's Cuckoo Bumble Bee

Bombus suckleyi



© KIRSTEN MUMFELLY



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Species Description

The Suckley's Cuckoo Bumble Bee is a medium sized (15-25 mm long) bee with females slightly larger than males. Both sexes have a black abdomen with yellow hairs around the tip, however these hairs are more abundant in males. Like all cuckoo bumble bees, it is a social parasite, meaning it does not build its own nest but instead lays its eggs in the nest of a host species —bees in the subgenus *Bombus*. This parasitic strategy means they rely on the female workers of their host species to raise their young. Because of this, Suckley's Cuckoo Bumble Bees lack a pollen basket – a specialized structure found on the hind legs of most female bumble bees used for collecting pollen to feed developing larvae.

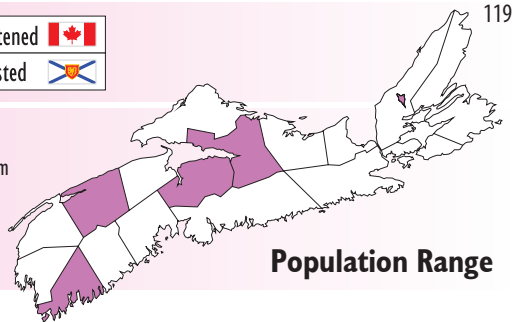
Host species

STATUS

Threatened 

Not listed 

Historical records exist from only four locations across mainland Nova Scotia.



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Habitat

As a social parasite, Suckley Cuckoo Bumble Bee depends on the nesting habitats of its host species. In Nova Scotia, its presumed host is the Yellow-banded Bumble Bee (*Bombus terricola*), which nests in deserted underground cavities. Suckley's Cuckoo Bumble Bee can be found in a variety of habitats, including forests, meadows, farmlands, and urban areas. It is a generalist nectar forager, feeding on a wide range of flowering plants, including asters and goldenrods.



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Look for Suckley's Cuckoo Bumble Bees between May and September in areas with abundant flowering plants, such as asters.





Interesting Points

- Because they do not produce worker bees, cuckoo bees are generally much less numerous than social bumble bees, making up less than 4% of recorded bee observations in North America.
- In Nova Scotia, the Yellow-banded Bumble Bee is also the host of another at-risk cuckoo species, the Bohemian Cuckoo Bumble Bee.
- Suckley's Cuckoo Bumble Bee may have been extirpated from Nova Scotia, as it has not been recorded in the province since 1961 or in the Maritimes since 1978.



Female

© JOOP BLITH

Similar Species

Bohemian Cuckoo Bumble Bee

The Bohemian Cuckoo Bumble Bee is closely related to Suckley's Cuckoo Bumble Bee. Both species are widely distributed in Canada and share similar social parasitic lifestyles.

Identification

Identification is very challenging, and expert confirmation is often necessary. Please reach out to the contacts on this page for help in identification if you think you have spotted a Bohemian Cuckoo Bumble Bee or a Suckley's Cuckoo Bumble Bee.

Female Bohemian Cuckoo Bumble Bees lack the prominent triangular ridges on the underside of the last segment of the abdomen that Suckley's Cuckoo Bumble Bees have. Male Suckley's Cuckoo Bumble Bees have more abundant yellow hairs on their bodies. Females have pale hairs on the top of their heads, whereas female Bohemian Cuckoo Bumble Bees have dark hairs in this area.



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Threats to Survival

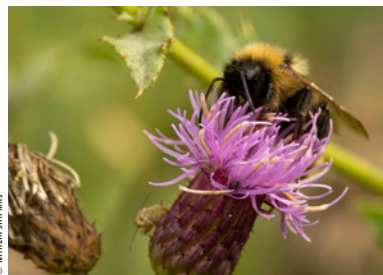
- Its greatest threat is the decline of its host species. In Nova Scotia, the presumed host, the Yellow-banded Bumble Bee, is also at risk and provincially designated as vulnerable.
- Pathogen spillover from commercial bee colonies.
- Pesticide use in agricultural operations.

How You Can Help

You can support this species by planting bee-friendly native plants such as goldenrod, asters, rubus, milkweed, and other nectar-rich flowers. Avoid using pesticides or herbicides in your garden to protect visiting bees and report any potential sightings of the Suckley's Cuckoo Bumble Bee or its host to the Atlantic Canada Conservation Data Centre. Participate in citizen science forums such as iNaturalist, Bumble Bee Watch, and BugGuide.



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Contacts, Information & Sighting Reports

Contact: NS Department of Natural Resources: biodiversity@novascotia.ca

Info: www.sararegistry.gc.ca

Sighting Reports: Atlantic Canada Conservation Data Centre: john.klymko@accdc.ca; 1-866-727-3447; www.bumblebeewatch.org; www.inaturalist.org; bugguide.net