

CUCKOO BUMBLE BEE

Hymenoptera: Apidae
Bombus flavidus

Bug
of the
Month

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“Cuckoo bumble bees” is the common name for the species of socially parasitic bumble bees in the subgenus *Psithyrus*. ***Bombus flavidus*** is a species native to Pennsylvania, and one of the most widely distributed bumble bee species. It is relatively small bumble bee, with yellow and black hairs on the thorax and yellow or white hairs on the back of the abdomen.

Cuckoo bumble bees have a distinct developmental and social lifecycle compared to other bumble bees. Cuckoo bees don’t and can’t start their own colonies. Instead, a female cuckoo infiltrates a different bumble bee species’ nest, usurps its queen, and forces the workers from that colony to rear her offspring. This unique life cycle has led cuckoo bees to lose some physical traits that other bumble bees have, while gaining other traits. Notably, their

pollen baskets (corbiculae) are absent, and they cannot produce sufficient wax for colony initiation. Alternatively, cuckoos have a thicker exoskeleton, larger pheromone glands, and increased egg laying ability to assist in colony invasion.

The term “cuckoo” applies to multiple parasitic bee and wasp lineages and is inspired by the famous cuckoo birds.

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