

NORTHERN PAPER WASP

Hymenoptera: Vespidae

Polistes fuscatus

Bug
of the
Month



The northern paper wasp (*Polistes fuscatus*) is a social wasp that earns its name from the papery nests it builds. Female paper wasps chew on wood fibers and other plant materials, which mix with their saliva to form an effective building material. They use this pulp to construct a nest composed of hexagonal cells (similar to the shape of honeycomb), in which they lay eggs. To protect their

nest, *P. fuscatus* secrete repellent chemicals from glands in their abdomen, which they rub onto the paper. These chemicals ward off predatory ants, which may otherwise feast on the eggs.

Once *P. fuscatus* eggs hatch, adults must forage for prey. Females attack caterpillars, chew them up, and roll them into “meatballs,” which they transport back to the nest and feed to the hungry larvae.

The adults, however, don’t take part in this caterpillar feast. Instead, they consume exclusively liquids, primarily drinking sweet nectar from flowers. While searching for nectar, paper wasps often transfer pollen between flowers, helping plants to fruit and reproduce. So, while these wasps may receive less love than bees, they are important pollinators in their own right!

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