

Bug of the Month

by Jim Revell / September 2017

Yellowjacket Hover Fly

Yellow Jacket Hover Fly

Class: Insecta (Insects)
Order: Diptera
Family: Syrphidae (syrphid flies)
Genus: *Milesia*
Species: *virginiensis*



Back in early August, I came across this Insect hovering over a Black-eyed Susan flower in our garden. It was feeding on nectar from the flower. The insect looked like a Yellowjacket but upon taking a closer look, I could tell it was not, due to its body shape (having one pair of wings, and markings close, but not exactly like a Yellowjacket). The “hovering” was also a clue it wasn’t a Yellowjacket. My thought was, it was a member of the Hover Flies, but which one?

My research turned up the Yellowjacket Hover Fly, also known as the “Virginia Flower Fly.” The insect is about 3/4 inch to 7/8 inch in size. It ranges from Ontario to Minnesota, eastward and south to Florida, Texas and Colorado. It can be seen from mid-Summer to Fall, depending on the region, i.e., June-August in Oklahoma and May-November in North Carolina.

This Hover Fly flies aggressively and, by its buzzing, acts like a hornet. It also has a habit of hovering in front of a person and is said to be good luck if you can get it to perch on your finger! Note - - this is very difficult to do!

In the South, it is believed to mimic the Southern Yellow Jacket. Characteristics that help identify the Yellowjacket Hover Fly include:



- * Yellow and orange-banded
- * Abdomen twice as long as thorax
- * Black bands across upper surface of thorax
- * Yellow head
- * Reddish eyes
- * Yellowish-brown legs
- * Smoky wings

Though the fly may act like a hornet or Yellow Jacket, it is harmless. Adults are active during the day and feed on nectar of flowers. They can be found resting on low shrubs and other vegetation. It is believed larvae develop in rotting wood in tree holes.

Photo References:

Bugguide.net, Cotinus, Durham County, NC: <http://bugguide.net/node/view/7713>

Bottom photo, Jefferson Davis Community College: http://wildflowers.jdcc.edu/Yellowjacket_Hover_Fly.html

Research References / Resources:

National Wildlife Federation’s Field Guide to Insects and Spiders of North America, by Arthur V. Evans

BugGuide.net, species *Milesia virginiensis* – Yellowjacket Hover Fly