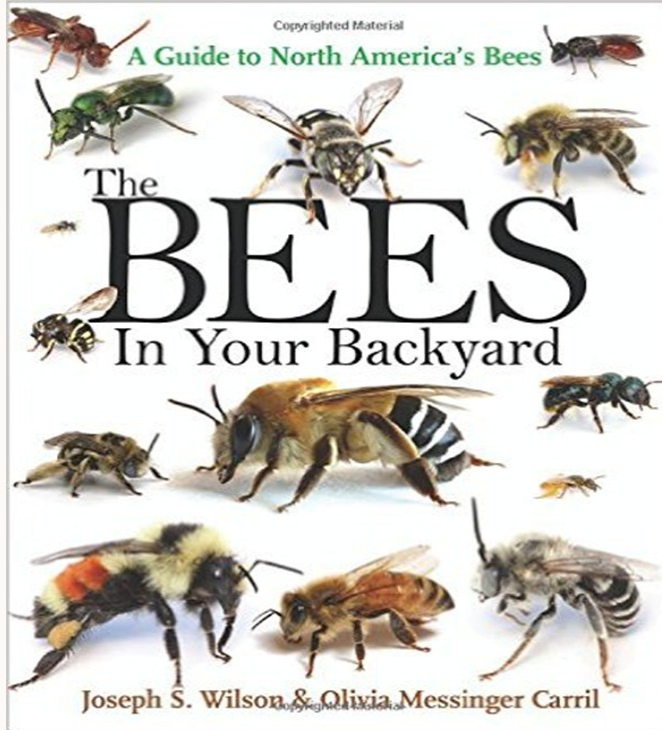


A Book Review

Lynn Sniderman MGV 2012



The Bees in Your Backyard: A Guide to North America's Bees, by Joseph S. Wilson and Olivia J. Messinger Carril
288 pages ISBN 978-0-691-16077-1

They're not all honey bees or bumble bees! With over 4,000 bee species in North America, being able to tell even the most common types apart is a challenge. Wilson and Carril's guide will not disappoint—with many hundreds of color photos of bees as well as information on where they live, their role as pollinators, how they gather food and detailed identification tips. Since we are well aware of the enormous importance of these insects in gardens and on farms, it surely is prudent to spend some time learning more. What is a bee vs. a wasp vs. a fly, when they share so many characteristics? I now know that the pesky "ground bee" that stung me last year while hiking was actually probably a wasp. The dichotomous key (an "if..then" chart) makes successful bee ID feasible for

a beginner. This reference will be enormously helpful to both beginners and experts in accurately identifying the many buzzing insects in our yards and gardens.

For every bee family and genus in North America, the authors enumerate key ID features, nesting habits, distribution and what they pollinate. Even if you have no interest in learning much about bee identification, you will learn fascinating bee facts in each chapter. For example, the abundant and very common *Lasio-glossum* species are often called sweat bees. They seem to crave sweat that they can lick off of overheated humans. Sweat, being high in salt, seems to be important for this species. I learned that scientists have discovered that honey bees are actually able to vote when making decisions about where to move their hive. Or that bumble bees are able to fly at elevations higher than some helicopters. And it is only the honey bee that loses its sting after it uses it once. No other bee has barbs on its sting. Who knew that only female bees can sting, because the stinger is a modified ovipositor—the egg-layer? Amazing stuff!

Learning more about the natural world always does amaze. The details of bees' lives are rich and important to our own successes. The book will help you promote more bees in your neighborhood and dispel many of the myths that oversimplify their role in nature.

