

Fly Time

Eric A. Neubauer

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The first wave of butterflies has passed leaving very few besides Silver-spotted Skippers and Cabbage Whites for now. However, there are at least four swallowtail caterpillars on the parsley foretelling better times ahead. Boredom leads to broadening one's interests, and I've found there is a cornucopia of flies to be seen. Meanwhile, the Bluebirds continue to raise their family, and the nestlings are becoming increasingly vocal.

Eric Neubauer
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Green and Blue Bottle Flies are well known and gather on decaying matter and dung. I see many Green Bottle Flies, *Phaenicia sericata*, but very few Blue Bottle Flies, *Calliphora vomitoria*. Surprisingly, the Blue Bottle Fly is also known as the Common Blow Fly. Not so in my back yard!

Another well known fly is the House Fly, but there are many other similar species. Identifying bugs is often difficult because of the range of sizes and sexual dimorphism within species, and the large numbers of similar species. Small size doesn't help!



This is a Drone Fly, *Eristalis tenax*. It mimics the Honey Bee in both behavior and diet, so insectivorous animals will often avoid it. The larva live in polluted water. If the eggs are ingested, they can hatch and cause intestinal myiasis. This appears to be true of some other fly species too. Not at all a pleasant idea and a good reason to keep flies off of food. The Drone Fly is a non-native from Europe.



It is often useful to have multiple views of a particular species for identification. From this angle, you can't mistake this Drone Fly for a Honey Bee with those eyes. I usually take as many photos as possible, but only some are good enough for publication.



This is believed to be a Narcissus Bulb Fly, *Merodon equestris*, which comes from the British Isles. It's another one of the many species of hover flies. This one is entirely black with blond hair.



This fairly small fly species with peachy wings that was only seen once. It may be a Tachinid fly. Note the widely spaced eyes and red legs.

This distinctively marked species was only seen once. The markings are somewhat reminiscent of the Drone Fly and some of the other species that hover around flowers including the Yellowjacket Hover Fly and Flower Fly.

An internet search using “Flower Fly” came up with a very similar looking *Parhelophilus spp.* and a fairly similar looking *Helophilus spp.* I was unable to find a perfect match, so it must remain unidentified for now.





The American Hover Fly, *Metasyrphus americanus*, spends a lot of time hovering around flowers where it drinks nectar. The larva of hover flies prey on aphids and scale insect larva, so these flies are quite beneficial.



At first I thought this was another American Hover Fly, but the larger, close set eyes and slightly different pattern on the abdomen seem to suggest otherwise. There are so many different kinds of these critters.



This is a smaller hover fly. It has a rather large head and distinctive markings. I found two photos of the same species on the internet, but neither was identified. Fortunately, I found a somewhat similar fly in the genus *Allograpta*, which led me to *Allograpta obliqua* at Wikipedia. It is native to North America.



Here is yet another smaller hover fly with a smaller head and a longer, more slender abdomen than *Allograpta obliqua*. This unknown species has a minimum of black on the abdomen. It may be a *Toxomerus* Hover Fly.



This one was easy to identify since it was actually in my insect guide unlike some others. It is a Toxomerus Hover Fly, *Toxomerus spp.* which feeds on aphids as a larva and nectar as an adult. Dessert should always be the last course in a meal or in this case, a life.



Here is an excellent opportunity to study sexual dimorphism. From this, we can conclude that the fly in the other photo is a male.



This is a small, lively Long-legged Fly, *Condylostylus* spp. The individuals I have seen are all consistent in appearance including the darkened areas on the wings. Both the larva and adults prey on small insects.



This is a less common, golden Condylostylid Fly with clear wings. The darkened areas typically on the wings of Condylostylid Flies may disappear at certain angles, but this species doesn't appear to have any at all.



Above: A number of species resemble House Flies. This is one of them and is probably in the Tachinid family, *Tachinidae*. The larva are parasitic on other insects. Note the long bristles on the abdomen.

Left: The odds of getting a “twofer” photo like this one with both subjects in good focus is small.



This species is a Picture-wing Fly, *Delphinia picta*, an innocuous native species which rotates and waves its wings in an attention getting way. Personally, I'd call it a Gas Mask Fly.

These are often confused with non-native flies in the *Tephritidae* family which include some noxious species like the Mediterranean Fruit Fly that damage fruit.





Crane flies, *Tipula spp.*, are often mistaken for huge mosquitoes. However, the larva are vegetarians and the adults don't eat.



This slender, medium sized fly may be one of the Robber Flies. Or maybe not. It does prove that when you have bristly legs, it doesn't matter if three of your feet slip over the edge.

When I photographed this duo, I thought, “Hey cool, it’s a Bumble Bee with a Grape Leaf Skeletonizer Moth. I didn’t know they did that.” Well, they don’t. The presumed Bumble Bee’s antennae are all wrong and it lacks the rotund abdomen of a real Bumble Bee.

This is actually one of the Robber Flies, *Laphria grossa*, and the largest fly I’ve seen this season. Apparently large robber flies are favorites among fly aficionados.

We’ve had Grape Leaf Skeletonizer Moths ever since we allowed wild grapes to come up by themselves.





I tentatively named this species the “Lamb’s Ear Bee” because of its exclusive haunt in our yard. It did not appear to have a stinger, but the impressive jaws ruled out it’s being a fly despite its hovering behavior. Oddly enough, a google search for “Lamb’s Ear Bee” photos quickly led to the correct name, the European Wool Carder Bee, *Anthidium manicatum*.

And so, this is apparently a bee which mimics a fly which mimics a bee. The markings on the abdomen apparently vary quite a bit.



The male is about twice as large as the female who scrapes balls of wool off of the Lamb’s Ear to build her nest. Despite the somewhat scary appearance, the adults eat pollen. This species was originally from Europe, but is now cosmopolitan.

The males appeared about a week before the females, and mating began several days after that. Both of these photos are of males.



The Climber Dragonfly, *Tetragoneuria spp.*, represents a very old line of insects and is not a true fly. The larva eat aquatic insects, and the adults eat insects too. It's possible this adult spent its youth in our pond.



The Assassin Bug, *Pselliopus cinctus*, preys on other insects. It is a close relative of the larger but better camouflaged Wheel Bug shown in my original back yard essay, *Who's Been Licking the Tall Elm Tree?* The single large fang is folded up near its neck.

This bug has nothing to do with flies except that it appeared while I was working on this essay and was too good to pass up.