



Your Fall Report

Why wild bees need our help the most

By Steve Blackledge, director of our national conservation program

Our members know that bees are indispensable pollinators, vital to the health of wild flowering plants and food crops alike. But “bee” is a big category—holding everything from buzzing hives of honeybees, to round fuzzy bumblebees, to metallic blue mason bees, and more.

So we know that saving the bees is important. But which bees need our protection, and how can we help them?

Most people think of one species

The first animal many of us think of when we think “bee” is the European honeybee, also known as the western honeybee, *Apis mellifera*. These black-and-yellow striped insects live in densely populated hives that turn pollen and nectar into the honey you buy at the farmer’s market or grocery store.

The western honeybee is common in the U.S. because it is the species most frequently kept by beekeepers. Domestic honeybee hives are important pollinators of some specific crops, including almonds and lemons, but they are not native to America. These bees were imported here from Europe in the 17th century and have worked as partners to humans in agriculture ever since.

But there are thousands of species of wild bees

Honeybees are far from the only species of bee here. There are over 4,000 species of native bee that lived in America before



Environment America’s Steve Blackledge huddles with staff during our D.C. lobby day to advocate for America’s wildlife.

the honeybee arrived and that still live here today.

Our native bee species are a magnificent kaleidoscope of diversity. They range from less than 2 millimeters in length (the world’s smallest bee, *Perdita minima*), to over an inch in size (the shiny black common carpenter bee, *Xylocopa virginica*), and everywhere in between. Their colors range from the familiar black and yellow to the magnificent blue of the orchard mason bee, *Osmia lignaria*.

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Thanks
for making it
all possible

Virginia foam ban begins in 2025

Let the countdown to zero waste begin! Starting July 1, 2025, Virginia's large restaurant chains will no longer use single-use foam cups and takeout containers. Smaller establishments will have until 2026 to comply with the ban.

Single-use foam cups and takeout containers are terrible for our environment. They easily become litter and remain in our environment

Let's build a bison bridge near Yellowstone

Late last year, 13 bison were tragically killed in a semi-truck collision near Yellowstone National Park. More recently, advocacy groups reported that two more bison—a cow and her calf—were killed on the same road this month, further underscoring the urgent need for protective measures.

Fortunately, states now have the funding to build wildlife crossings—thanks to the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program launched earlier this year. But, as the recent bison deaths remind us, we need to take action.

Environment America is calling on U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg to prioritize the release of the next round of funding so that states can get to work creating new wildlife crossings that will save America's wildlife and reduce the number of fatal accidents.

Thanks to your membership, we'll keep advocating for the wildlife bridges, underpasses and fencing needed to protect the iconic bison near Yellowstone and other creatures throughout the U.S.

Gov. Youngkin to weaken Virginia vehicle emission standards

Gov. Glenn Youngkin abandoned the stronger vehicle emission standards that were set to accelerate electric vehicle (EV) adoption. This moves Virginia backward in its efforts to combat climate change and protect public health.

The former standards created a low-emission vehicle (LEV) and a zero-emission vehicle (ZEV) program to boost overall EV adoption. Personal vehicles are the largest source of emissions in Virginia, and this shortsighted decision will lead to increased pollution, higher risks of adverse climate effects and health risks for citizens.

“Virginians increasingly have shown that they want EVs. Rolling back our commitment to clean cars will leave Virginia on the sidelines as we watch other states embrace electrification, clean air and a healthier, safer future,” said Environment Virginia State Director Elly Boehmer Wilson.

Electric vehicles are the future. Tell your legislator now to defend clean cars in Virginia.

Get more updates on our work online at <https://environmentvirginia.org>.

Staff



Thanks to support from members like you, we won a ban on single-use foam cups and takeout containers that will start taking effect in Virginia next summer.

for generations because they never actually decompose. Instead, foam breaks down into tiny pieces. Animals mistake these bits of plastic for food and can be killed or injured by plastic foam pollution.

In 2018, Environment Virginia launched our Wildlife Over Waste campaign, calling on our leaders to ban single-use foam. Over the course of the next three years, our outreach team talked to over 100,000 Virginians and collected more than 50,000 petition signatures calling on our state elected officials to eliminate foam cups and take out containers. The bill passed with bipartisan support and was signed into law by Gov. Ralph Northam in 2021.

Unfortunately, a change in administration in 2022 meant the ban was in danger, repeatedly attacked by industry groups and significantly delayed from implementation through the budget process. But we kept organizing until the delay was lifted and the General Assembly moved forward the dates to 2025 and 2026.

The path has not been easy, but we are excited for our countdown to a foam free Virginia thanks to the demonstrated public support from citizens, including members and supporters like you.

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Why wild bees need our help the most

We haven't yet discovered all the wonders our native bees have to offer. But no matter how big or how small, whether they've been discovered or not, every native bee has a job as a pollinator.

More than 700 of our native U.S. bee species are on the decline

That includes the rusty patched bumblebee, whose population plunged 90% before it was placed on the endangered species list. In order to ensure the rusty patched bumblebee's survival, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service needs to protect its critical habitat.

The full list of native bees that need our help is a long one. Protecting bees of all stripes is a good thing to do—but “saving the bees” doesn't mean just honeybees.

A class of pesticides called neonicotinoids (or “neonics”) is particularly devastating to all bees. Honeybees exposed to these chemicals can face uncontrollable shaking, paralysis and death. Scientists haven't di-

rectly tested the impacts of neonics on all the thousands of species of native bee in the U.S., but blue orchard bees exposed to neonicotinoids as larvae produced 20% fewer offspring than unexposed bees. Researchers also found that neonics harm baby bumblebee brains. habitat.

Another thing honeybees and wild bees share is that they need nectar and pollen to survive. Native bees are especially vulnerable to habitat loss. A healthy habitat full of flowering native plants is vital to the health of bee populations.

What you can do to save the bees

Cutting back on pesticides, protecting critical habitat and reducing carbon emissions can all go a long way to protect every kind of bee. You can help protect bees in your state by calling on your governor to support cultivating native plants and wildflowers on public lands.

For years, our staff and volunteers have been building support to save the bees. Now, 1 in 4 Americans live in a state that has restricted the use of bee-killing neonicotinoids.



Marc Olivier Le Blanc
Bee photos: Chase Danimullis via Shutterstock

Right: Common carpenter bee, *Xylocopa virginica*. Actual size.
Above left: American bumblebee, *Bombus pensylvanicus*. Actual size.

Our mission

We all want clean air, clean water and open spaces. But it takes independent research and tough-minded advocacy to win concrete results for our environment, especially when powerful interests stand in the way of environmental progress.

That's the idea behind Environment Virginia, Inc., a project of Environment America, Inc. We focus on protecting Virginia's air, water and open spaces. We speak out and take action at the local, state and national levels to improve the quality of our environment and our lives.

Featured staff



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Elly Boehmer Wilson
State Director

A former canvass director and organizer with Impact, Elly now directs Environment Virginia's efforts to promote clean air, clean water and open spaces in Virginia. Elly lives in Richmond, Virginia, where she enjoys gardening, photography, hiking and rollerblading with her dog.

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Your 2024 Fall Report

“For millennia, ancient forests have watched over us and sustained us. Can we do the same for them?”

*Will Harlan
Center for Biological Diversity*

100,000 citizens agree: Let our most precious forests grow older

There’s nothing like walking through an old-growth forest. Magnificent oaks, black walnut, hickory, maple and birch stand like giants against the sky, while ferns, shrubs, mosses and wildflowers dot the understory.

Sadly, there are very few old-growth trees left in Virginia due to logging last century—and more than 50 million acres of mature and old-growth forests on federal lands in Virginia and across the U.S. are

still unprotected from logging.

Environment Virginia campaign staff spent this summer knocking on doors, encouraging thousands of supporters and members like you to get involved in a comment period on a proposed national forest plan amendment. The United States Forest Service announced the amendment process in December, signaling a major opportunity to shift the way it will manage old-growth trees and forests.

“Our older forests are our most precious forests. These trees have been standing for longer than most people have been alive and are home to thousands of species that depend on them for food and shelter,” said Environment America’s Public Lands Campaign Director Ellen Montgomery.

Our campaign staff went door to door to speak with thousands of people like you to build support for protecting our mature and old-growth forests.



Kate Scott via Shutterstock