

Bee decline a cause for concern

By **NATHAN HOWES**
Special to the IFP

While much of the media attention on bees lately has focused on honeybees, Conservation Halton natural heritage ecologist Brenda Van Ryswyk says we're going to have to rely on both honeybees and wild bees for crops in the future.

"The wild bees have been providing huge pollinator benefits and we just haven't realized it until they've started to decline. All of a sudden we wonder why we didn't have any strawberries this year. Well it's because you killed all of your bees that were pollinating it," said Van Ryswyk.

While the exact number of native bees in Halton is unknown, she estimates there's at least a "couple hundred" different species in the Region and about 4,000 across North America. About 90 per cent of wild plants are pollinated by bees in some way.

"If we lost the wild bees, we would lose all of our flowering plants. If we lost all of our wild pollinators, we would really have a very different landscape," said Van Ryswyk. "They're much more efficient than the European honeybee."

Van Ryswyk said wild bees such as bumblebees are important pollinators and many crops, including tomatoes and strawberries, wouldn't exist without them.

But bumblebees are under a lot of pressure from different sources and are in decline "for the same reason as honeybees."

"Bumblebees are being attacked by diseases right now because a lot of greenhouses bring in cultivated bumblebees from other areas. Sometimes the domesticated bumblebees will have parasites and the parasites have been found to migrate to the wild populations," said Van Ryswyk.

Bumblebees don't create their own nests—they find an abandoned mouse hole and nestle inside it. However, if there's no habitat for the mice, there's no habitat for the bumblebees, Van Ryswyk explained.

"In previous farming practices, they used to have a lot of hedgerows with a lot of wildflowers and shrubs that grew. That

area was prime habitat for bumblebees and wild bees to nest in," said Van Ryswyk. "A lot of farms these days feel it's more efficient to clear those away and have more of a factory farm."

The rusty-patched bumblebee is in danger, for example, and is a newly listed endangered species in Canada and is the first federally listed bee in North America, according to Wildlife Preservation Canada.

In Canada, only three individuals have been located in the past 10 years with the only current known population residing at Pinery Provincial Park.

"From the scientific community there's been a lot of concern about (wild bees) as well. When a lot of people think of bees, they think of the honeybees, (but) there are about 900 other species of bees in Ontario alone. They're part of our ecosystem," said Paul Kozak, an apiary specialist with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food and the Ministry of Rural Affairs

(OMAFRA).

While beekeepers play a big role in sustaining honeybee populations, there are certain things a homeowner can do to help the wild bees, Van Ryswyk said.

For example, people can plant native flowers that provide nectar and pollen and leave behind nesting areas using old branches and twigs on their properties.

"Make sure that any flowers you do use still have pollen and nectar because there are actually some cultivars that have been created and are marketed as allergy-friendly, but there are no good for bees," she said.

Homeowners can also put up bee bundles in their backyards for nesting or just leave a section of the garden with old stems lying around.

To lose both the honeybees and native bees could have a "tremendous effect," Van Ryswyk explained, adding 90 per cent of wild plants would be lost as well as all crops that require pollination.

"As a species, we would have to rely on grains to survive. It would be really hard for us to survive on only those resources. I'm not sure we could sustain ourselves that way."



Pictured is a possible digger bee, which belongs to the Genus Anthophora, says Brenda Van Ryswyk of Conservation Halton.

Conservation Halton photo

APPLEBY SYSTEMS GEORGETOWN INC.

Early-Bird Special
 BOOK NOW AND SAVE ON YOUR
FURNACE AND/OR FIREPLACE MAINTENANCE

FOR A LIMITED TIME
SAVE THE HST!

905 877-8990 **Show Room**

118 Guelph St. Georgetown

• FURNACE • FIREPLACE • BBQs • AIR CONDITIONING

GEORGETOWN GARDEN CENTRE
140 GUELPH ST. 905-877-8882
 (The former Georgetown Fruit Market building)

Closed Mondays
ONTARIO GROWN
 Bushels of **ROMA TOMATOES**

GARDEN MUMS
 3 for \$20.00 (10" Pot)

Fresh Cut **BOUQUETS** From 3 for \$10

Super Sweet **Peaches & Cream Corn**
 Local Grown **Peaches & Tomatoes**

MIXED ACCENT PLANTERS
 Great colours & variety from \$14.99

Huge Selection **Large Size Perennial Plants**
 Hydrangeas, Rose of Sharon, Perennial Grasses & more

Top Soil
 25 litre bag \$1.99

The McGibbon Hotel
LUNCH BUFFET
SERVED THURSDAY & FRIDAY
 Featuring: 11:30 am to 2:00 pm **\$11.50**
 - Roast Beef - Assorted Salads
 - Roast Ham - Dessert Table
 - Fish & Chips - Tea & Coffee
 HST INCLUDED
 Private Catering Available

~ LIVE ENTERTAINMENT ~
Fri. & Sat. 9:30 pm - close
Skip Tracer
79 Main Street South, Georgetown
905-877-3388

ROOFING
 ROOFS THAT LAST
 FAMILY OWNED AND OPERATED BUSINESS
 112 John St., Georgetown, ON L7G 4T5
416-579-5293

Asphalt shingle reroofing
 WSIB coverage
 Fully licenced & insured
 10 year labour warranty
 Free estimates
 Fast, economical, reliable service
 Local Georgetown business since 2008

PREFERRED CONTRACTOR

Mention this ad and receive **\$100.00 OFF** the price of a new roof