

Guide on Photographing Pollinators

It is always exciting to see our native pollinators sipping nectar or gathering pollen on beautiful flowers. It is also a lot of fun photographing them while they go about their important business. They aren't always the most cooperative of subjects but with some perseverance and practice you can get great pictures of these small wonders.

There are a few steps involved in getting a good picture of a pollinator. The first thing that you must do is find them and to find them doing something interesting. The best time to look is when the sun is out and warming things up, from mid-morning through the afternoon and the obvious place to look is on flowers. Many pollinators, especially native bees prefer native flowers such as Black-eyed Susans, Coneflowers, native Sunflowers, and Wild Bergamot. Look for large, dense plantings that will have a greater diversity of species in higher concentrations.

The next step is to get your camera and yourself ready. The first thing that you must decide is how you will take the picture – are you going to use a telephoto lens and take it from a distance or are you going to get closer to the insect. In either case you should know how close you can get to the subject and how to quickly get it properly focussed. Another important consideration is the amount of light that you have available. If it is bright and sunny there shouldn't be any problems but if the pollinator is in the shadows, you can use the camera's flash or if your camera supports it, increase the ISO.

Now that you have found the pollinators and you have everything ready to photograph them there are few things that will help to get better pictures. Many pollinator images show the back of a bee with its head downing the flower. For more dramatic shots try to get lower with the subject at your eye level. In this way you can get portraits and profiles that are more interesting and that show the finer details of the insect. If possible, move towards the pollinator from the side, it is less threatening than approaching from directly above or casting a shadow causing it to flee the scene.

The most important element of a good picture of a pollinator is to have it in focus, especially the eyes if they are visible. The viewer is always drawn to the face of the insects and if it is out of focus, they will consider it a poor image. But if you have taken a good image and the subject is too small in the frame it is also a good idea to crop it so that the pollinator becomes the star of the show.

- **Bob Noble,**
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Local Pollinator and Nature Photographer