



SHAKOPEE VALLEY NEWS

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BREAKING NEWS ONLINE AT WWW.SHAKOPEENEWS.COM

A RARE FIND

Rusty patched bumble bee on a culver's-root at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Arboretum.

PHOTO BY SUSAN DAY/UW-MADISON ARBORETUM

The rusty patched bumble bee delights with appearances in residential gardens. Researchers hope better understanding the bee will prevent extinction

BY CHRISTINE SCHUSTER
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Sightings of Minnesota's state bee continue to excite bee surveyors in the Twin Cities metro who say the endangered pollinator has recently been spotted in residential gardens and other urban landscapes.

The rusty patched bumble bee, formally named *bombus affinis*, landed on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's endangered species list in 2017.

The rusty patched bumble bee's population has declined by an estimated 87% over the past 20 years, according to the agency. Today, the bee is believed to be present in only 0.1% of its historical range.

Angela Grill, a wildlife biologist with Three Rivers Park District, spends each summer looking for the rusty patched bumble bee in the roughly 27,000 acres of land managed by the park district throughout the Twin Cities.

Grill said finding the rusty patched bumble bee in the park district's vast restored prairies is like finding a needle in a haystack — yet, bee researchers continue to hear of sightings of the bee in smaller gardens in highly-developed areas.

"It's kind of puzzling I think to researchers right now," she said.

In Burnsville, for example, sightings of the rusty patched bumble bee have been documented in some residential gardens, according to Linnea Wier, a senior natural resources and forestry technician with the city.

Grill said researchers trying to understand rusty patched bumble bee sightings in the Twin Cities area are trying to balance two unknowns; why the bees choose the locations they choose and how much of our information is shaped by differing research methods.

"I think there's still a lot of unknown and lessons to be learned that researchers are trying to figure out," she said.

While small pollinator gardens can be a surprising draw for the

rusty patched bumble bee, large-scale conservation efforts have also proven beneficial.

Surveyors in Burnsville discovered the rusty patched bumble bee in 2018 and again spotted the bee in city parks in 2019. Last year's survey confirmed the bee's presence in two additional city parks after park-goers reported sightings.

Wier said a two-acre area where the city completed a turf-to-prairie conversion project is one of the locations where the bee has been sighted — she said it's especially exciting to find an endangered species in an area that wasn't previously providing any resources to bumblebees.

On Three Rivers land, Grill said bee surveyors had a great year in 2018 when they found rusty patched bumble bees in seven park locations.

The next survey, completed in 2020, only found three rusty patched bumble bees at two locations; over 2,000 bees were captured and identified.

Interestingly, a manicured garden property in Hennepin County is one place the surveyors have had luck spotting the rusty patched bumble bee year-after-year.

This year's Three Rivers surveys are ongoing.

While Grill remains hopeful, the

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PHOTO BY RACHEL MINSKE

Candles and flowers rest on the corner of Fourth Avenue and Spencer Street where Shakopee woman America Thayer was found dead the afternoon of July 28 by police.

Man charged with murder in girlfriend's death

Court documents allege several witnessed killing of America Thayer

BY RACHEL MINSKE
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A criminal complaint filed July 30 details the circumstances surrounding the alleged gruesome murder of a Shakopee woman at a busy residential intersection last week.

Alexis Saborit, 42, was charged in Scott County District Court with second-degree murder in the death of his long-time girl-



Alexis Saborit

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