

Robber Flies

By Brad Bond

Many flies that interact with flowers are look like bees. This provides some protection from predators that have learned to avoid stings. Freshly fledged birds haven't learned about stingers yet, and flies that mimic bees tend to delay their appearance until the fledglings are wary.

Bombomima grosso doesn't show up until early August giving early birds a month to learn to avoid them. *B. grosso* is itself a predator, a member of the Robber Fly family (Asilidae), who perch in exposed places from which they dart out to grab some other fly for a meal.



If you look hard at the antennae you'll see they are joined where they attach to the head. Bee antennae are attached separately. Another difference is the hump of thoracic muscle where the wings are attached; a predator needs fast flight and leg strength to hold the prey once caught.

Our most visible robber fly locally is *Promachus rufipes* that doesn't look like a bee. Survival has timed them to wait until August to make an appearance.



Here's one perched on Joe-Pye-Weed, not to feed on the nectar or pollen, but waiting for prey to come within flight reach. The mouth (proboscis) is that beak that extends below the facial hair, bristles which protect the face and eyes from the prey's struggles. *P. rufipes* often buzzes as it takes flight when people pass by an unseen perch. One of my favorite photographs is of an interrupted mating where the male wanted to leave and the female wanted to stay.



They are quite capable of flying while connected, but not in chase of prey. The female is bigger than the male and dominates when and where they go.