

Hoverflies in spring

by Carla Helfferich

On a warm day of my first spring in Alaska many long years ago, a friend took me for a hike through a patch of early flowers. I spotted a bee working among the blossoms. It was the skinniest, silliest-looking honeybee I ever saw. I commented on the poor creature's condition, which made my Alaska-born friend laugh. "That's not a bee," she said, "It's a hoverfly. Those little guys and bumblebees do about all the pollinating that gets done in the north."

She was right, but my mistake was understandable. Hoverflies do look a little like small, scrawny bees, though they seem to fly more like miniature helicopters. They hover in midair, wings an invisible blur, between forays onto flowers.