



## Critical Decline in Populations of the American Bumblebee and Monarchs

by Mary Wilson

According to the Center for Biological Diversity, the **American bumblebee** (*Bombus pensylvanicus*) has undergone dramatic reductions in recent decades, **populations having declined 89% in the last 20 years**. In an effort to protect this species conservation groups are urging the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service to list the bumblebee under the Endangered Species Act. If listed, the government could provide protections for the species and associated habitats.

Claire Burke from the Albany Law School says, “Without *Bombus pensylvanicus* spanning 47 of the lower 48 states, vegetation at the heart of the food chain for animals and humans will be hard pressed to reproduce and survive.”

The American bumblebee with its black-and-yellow, furry color pattern is a social insect who lives in colonies. They are generalists meaning that they provide essential pollination services to a wide variety of plants across its vast range. However, the American bumblebee is now **missing in eight states**, mostly states that have seen large increase in use of neonicotinoid pesticides.

In addition to the use of pesticides, other factors for this population decrease include loss of habitat, climate change, disease and competition from honey bees.

Another disturbing statistic has to do with **Monarch butterflies**, whose numbers in their winter resting grounds in central Mexico **decreased by about 26%** this winter. Illegal logging, draught, loss of habitat and overuse of pesticides are cited as reasons for this decline.

As homeowners **there are things we can** do to help these beleaguered pollinators. Suggestions include: plant native plants (flowers, shrubs and trees) to provide both nectar and pollen, reduce or better yet eliminate use of toxic pesticides, reduce size of your lawn, and provide nesting sites by leaving the leaves and not making your yard “too neat”. Hopefully, you will be rewarded by seeing more bees, butterflies and song birds in your yard.