WASP FACT SHEET

Sphex pensylvanicus
Great Black Wasp

Virginia Mountain Mint

Rattlesnake Master

Swamp Milkweed

Spotted Beebalm

Scientific Name: *Sphex pensylvanicus* (Sphecidae)
Common Name: Great Black Wasp

Range: This wasp is very prevalent in eastern North America from central Minnesota south to eastern Texas, and east to southern New Brunswick (Canada) and Florida. Scattered populations occur in the Dakotas south to western Texas and west to California.

Biology: *Sphex pensylvanicus* nests in well-drained, compacted soil in grassland habitats such as prairies or meadows. Males emerge prior to females. After mating with a male, the female establishes a nesting site and begins excavating a nest. To loosen the compacted soil, she clasps clumps in her mandibles and vibrates her thoracic flight muscles, transferring the vibrations to her head and mandibles. Backing out of the nest, she carries loads of excavated soil in her mandibles with the support of her forelegs. She drops the soil to one side of the burrow, then uses her forelegs to rake it farther from the nest. The fully provisioned nest contains multiple cells with each cell containing approximately two to six prey.

Prey: Katydids (family Tettigoniidae) including the genera *Microcentrum, Amblycorypha, Phaeneroptera,* and *Scudderia.*

Common Native Nectar Plants: Milkweed (*Asclepias*), mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum*), boneset (*Eupatorium*), goldenrod (*Solidago*), rattlesnake master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*), spotted beebalm (*Monarda punctata*), Culver's root (*Veronicastrum virginicum*), and white prairie clover (*Dalea candida*).

Activity: Early June to November (south) and late June to mid-October (north).

© Heather Holm
Find more wasp fact sheets: www.PollinatorsNativePlants.com