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# NY Bill Gives Pollinators Breather from Toxic Pesticides

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A pollinating bee in the wild. A new bill in New York would help bees like her out.

New York's birds, bees, and other pollinators need a break from neonics—[the bee-toxic pesticides](#) found in soil and water across the state from the Great Lakes to the Atlantic. Fortunately, a new bill introduced today by Assemblyman Steve Englebright, [the Birds and Bees Protection Act \(A.7639\)](#) (and a Senate companion bill introduced by Brad Hoylman, S.5816), would give them just that.

As neonics have risen to popularity in the last two decades, [insect populations have plummeted](#)—with bees, butterflies, and other pollinators hit especially hard.

New York is no stranger to the problem. State beekeepers have reported losing between 40% to nearly 70% of their hives per year in the last eight years, a dramatic spike in deaths. And the now-endangered [rusty patched bumble bee](#)—common in the state as recently as the early 1990s—hasn't been seen in New York since the year 2000.

While countries like [Europe and Canada](#) have moved to ban some neonics due to risks to pollinators and aquatic wildlife, the U.S., under the Trump Administration, [has done nothing](#), making state action critical.

In New York, while the state Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) banned two neonic chemicals in the mid-2000s—citing risks of them leaching through soil, contaminating water, and harming pollinators—it broadly approved others. Today, neonic use has become virtually ubiquitous in much of the state—a fact highlighted by recent U.S. Geological Survey water testing that found the neonic imidacloprid frequently in New York surface waters and nearly a third of groundwater samples on Long Island.



The Ruby-throated hummingbird, a pollinating bird in New York. The Birds and Bees Protection Act would help protect him too.

Fortunately, the Birds and Bees Protection Act — which would impose a five-year moratorium on all outdoor neonic use in New York — provides a crucial pause on these toxic pesticides while DEC studies their impacts. Here's why the bill is so desperately needed:

**Pollinators Are Dying Now** – Despite an outpouring of concern, years of research, and two official state pollinator protection plans, honey bees are dying just as fast as they ever were—suggesting the potential for similar losses for the state's 400+ native bee species, along with birds, butterflies, and other pollinators. With the rusty patched bumble bee already gone and pollination-dependent crops

contributing an estimated \$1.2 billion to the state's agricultural economy, New York can't afford to stand idly by while more pollinators disappear.

**A Clean Slate** – While a state-commissioned Cornell University study of neonics is already underway, state scientists may encounter a problem—neonics are already all over the place. Halting outdoor neonic uses now will give researchers a better understanding their effects by providing an opportunity to see what the environment looks like without them. And because neonics can stay in soil, water, and plants for several years, a multi-year moratorium is best.

**Time Is of the Essence** – Even after neonics' impacts in New York are better studied, DEC, legislative leaders, and other decision makers will need time to craft and implement the appropriate policies. The Act's five-year moratorium provides the needed time both for the required research and the response.

**Human Health Concerns** – Neonics may be [bad for New Yorkers too](#). While scientific study of neonic impacts on human health is still in its nascent stages,

emerging research now suggests that exposure to neonics in the womb or early in life may have links to developmental defects, autism, heart deformations, muscle tremors, and memory loss. With more studies in the pipeline, a pause on neonics to allow time for further human health research may well be worth the wait.

Aside from neonics, the bill also seeks to protect the states birds by charging DEC and Cornell university to develop guidance for cities and wind turbine operators on best practices to prevent bird strikes.

Overall, the Birds and Bees Protection Act represents one of the strongest actions on neonics in the country and would make New York a national leader in pollinator protection if it passes. And we hope it does just that, because New York's pollinators have suffered enough. It's time to give them a break!

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

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