



## Entomological Society of America Proposal Form for New Common Name or Change of ESA-Approved Common Name

Complete this form and e-mail to [pubs@entsoc.org](mailto:pubs@entsoc.org).

*Submissions will not be considered unless this form is filled out completely.*

The proposer is expected to be familiar with the rules, recommendations, and procedures outlined in the “Use and Submission of Common Names” on the ESA website at <https://www.entsoc.org/pubs/use-and-submission-common-names>.

### 1. Proposed new common name:

**Northern yellowjacket** for the species *Vespula alascensis* (Packard)

NOTE. This is a resubmission following receipt of convincing arguments from the Committee, and particularly its Chair, and coming up with some myself, that the name **Alaska yellowjacket** is unsuitable. The reasons include:

1. Use of an American geographic descriptor is discouraged at a time when the ESA is expanding globally.
2. Canadians, in particular, are embraced by the society as members of traditional branches as opposed to the International Branch, and the species spans the country from sea to sea to sea. Why not assign a Canadian name?
3. The species is a pest, and recognition of the name Alaska yellowjacket could be used by some to generate resentment and prejudice against Alaskans.
4. Because the name of the State is derived from a first nations word, the resentment and prejudice could be specifically directed toward first nations peoples.
5. The species is subject to management and part of insect management may involve killing. Advocating killing (murder) of Alaskans would be inappropriate.

### 2. Previously approved common name (if any):

The species was previously considered to be the **common yellowjacket**, *Vespula vulgaris*. Although this common name was not approved by the ESA, the species was referred to as the “common yellowjacket” by Akre et al. (1980). Akre et al. (1980) continues to be widely cited, but many other publications also erroneously refer to the species as the common yellowjacket.

### 3. Scientific name (genus, species, author):

Order: Hymenoptera

Family: Vespidae

Sub Family: Vespinae

*Vespula alascensis* (Packard)

## *Supporting Information*

**4. Please provide a clear and convincing explanation for why a common name is needed, possibly including but not limited to the taxon's economic, ecological, or medical importance, striking appearance, abundance, or conservation status:**

The species was previously known as the **common yellowjacket**, prior to its separation from what is now known to be the true common yellowjacket, *Vespula vulgaris*, based on molecular and morphological criteria (Carpenter and Glare 2010). The NEW STATUS specific name *Vespula alascensis* is based on a previous description of *Vespa alascensis*.

This native species ranges from coast to coast in North America and is particularly prevalent in northern climes, including much of Alaska, hence the specific name *alascensis*. *Vespula alascensis*, three other native yellowjackets (western, eastern and “southern” yellowjackets), and one invasive species (German yellowjackets) are also generalist scavengers, which brings them in frequent contact with humans, wherein they become pests. Although *Vespula alascensis* is outclassed as a pest by the other species in the southern parts of its range, it is sufficiently pestiferous in many locales that control measures are sought or implemented by afflicted humans. Of five native *Vespula* spp. captured in traps in Alaska by Landolt et al. (2005), *Vespula vulgaris* is the only species categorized as a pest. When I was employed by Scotts Miracle-Gro I was in frequent contact with an Alaskan entrepreneur who was plagued with *Vespula alascensis* (verified by me from photographs) in his greenhouse strawberry farm. This past summer my lunch on the back porch of our home in Burnaby, BC was frequently interrupted by *Vespula alascensis*. Three of the other pestiferous yellowjackets have common names assigned by the ESA, and there is a need to formalize the name for the “southern” yellowjacket. It is also time to adopt the common name **northern yellowjacket** for *Vespula alascensis*.

The new common name **northern yellowjacket** is proposed to avoid confusion by affirming that the species is distinct from the European **common yellowjacket**, which is a major pest, not only in Europe but in countries like New Zealand and Argentina where it is now well established. Thinking ahead, assigning the distinct common name northern yellowjacket will distinguish the native species from the European common yellowjacket when it inevitably becomes invasive in North America. Finally, assignment of northern yellowjacket as a new common name will provide entomologists, pest management professionals, and the informed public with a descriptive name to use in every-day communication without requiring use of the Latin scientific name.

**5. Stage or characteristic to which the proposed common name refers.**

(If the description involves a physical feature, it is strongly encouraged that an image of the organism be provided with this submission.)

All life stages.

**6. Distribution (include references):**

The species is widely distributed from northern Alaska, east across all Canadian territories (excluding Nunavut) and provinces and northern US States to the Atlantic coast (Akre et al. 1980: distribution map on page 73). There are three southerly “tendrils”, one on the Pacific coast extending incompletely into southern California, one in the Rocky Mountains to Arizona and New Mexico, and a third in the Appalachians to North Carolina. To provide additional information on the species range and prevalence, I compiled each locality at which the species was collected, as documented in a comprehensive monograph by Miller (1961), and segregated them by State, Territory and Province (Table 1). I did the same for western, eastern and “southern” yellowjackets, so that the ranges could be compared in the same table. See separate submission for the common name **southern yellowjacket**.

Table 1. States, Provinces and Territories in the USA and Canada where “northern”, western, eastern and “southern” yellowjackets occur. Numbers indicate the number of localities found for yellowjacket specimens examined from 16 entomological collections by Miller (1961).

Geographic Location	Numbers of locality records found in US States and Canadian Provinces and Territories for four species of yellowjackets			
	<i>Vespula alascensis</i> , “northern yellowjacket”	<i>Vespula pensylvanica</i> , western yellowjacket	<i>Vespula maculifrons</i> , eastern yellowjacket	<i>Vespula squamosa</i> , “southern yellowjacket”
USA (ALASKA)				
Alaska	9			
CANADA				
Yukon Territory	4			
Northwest Territory	5			
Nunavut <sup>a</sup>				
British Columbia	20	44		
Alberta	18	2		
Saskatchewan	6	2		
Manitoba	7		3	
Ontario	17		20	1
Quebec	13		9	
New Brunswick	2		2	
Nova Scotia	4		4	
Prince Edward Island	3			
Newfoundland & Labrador	1			
US STATES WITH MAJORITY OF AREA ABOVE THE LATITUDE OF OREGON’S SOUTHERN BORDER				
Washington	17	20		
Oregon	11	21		
Idaho	5	10		
Montana	3	9	1	
Wyoming	1	2		
North Dakota	1	Unk <sup>b</sup>	Unk <sup>b</sup>	
South Dakota	2	1	Unk <sup>b</sup>	
Minnesota	11		43	
Wisconsin	4		14	2
Michigan	6		6	1
New York	27		41	2
Massachusetts	5		29	
Connecticut	1		7	
Vermont	1		3	
New Hampshire	6			
Rhode Island			1	
Maine	2		3	
US STATES WITH MAJORITY OF AREA BELOW THE LATITUDE OF OREGON’S SOUTHERN BORDER				
California	26	96		
Nevada		7		
Utah	3	26		

Colorado	14	26		
Nebraska		1	1	
Arizona	4	29		
New Mexico	7	17	1	
Indiana	1		3	Unk <sup>b</sup>
Ohio	1		15	1
Pennsylvania	1		24	2
New Jersey	1		28	12
Virginia	1		29	13
Tennessee	3		5	3
North Carolina	2		16	5
Oklahoma			2	8
Texas			4	36
Iowa			12	1
Illinois			13	2
Missouri			Unk <sup>b</sup>	2
Kansas			7	2
Delaware			unk <sup>b</sup>	Unk <sup>b</sup>
Maryland			16	14
West Virginia			4	Unk <sup>b</sup>
Arkansas			2	3
Kentucky			1	1
South Carolina			3	4
Louisiana			2	6
Mississippi			Unk <sup>b</sup>	8
Alabama			2	10
Georgia			5	11
Florida			11	36

<sup>a</sup>While three species of *Vespula* are reported from Nunavut, none of the four species in this table are listed as occurring there (<https://nbes.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Common-Insects-of-Nunavut-low-res.pdf>).

<sup>b</sup>Unk (unknown number of locations) indicates that the species was not recorded in a state by Miller (1961) but the distribution maps in Akre et al. (1980) indicate presence of the species in a that state.

Although collection of a specimen is not a precise measure of abundance, I contend that collection of a species in numerous localities can be used as a rough indicator of prevalence. Accordingly, 212 (76.8%) of 276 locality records for *Vespula vulgaris* (Miller 1961) occur at a latitude north of the southern border of Oregon, with records from California and Colorado comprising 62.5% of the remainder, both occurring in the aforementioned southerly “tendrils”. Moreover, no specimens of the species were recorded from 17 of the 31 southerly states below the southern Oregon border. Based on the distribution map of Akre et al. (1980) and Table 1, it can be readily concluded that *Vespula alascensis* occurs mainly in the most northern band of US states, Alaska and almost all of Canada. This is a conservative conclusion. Although there are numerous records from Alaska and the Canadian territories and provinces, much of the vast area encompassed by their boundaries remains inaccessible by road to this day, and one would expect potential collection sites to be far less visited than those in the lower 48 US states. As climate change advances, one can expect that *Vespula alascensis* will be increasingly relegated to the more northerly parts of its range.

Despite the wide distribution, there is additional evidence that the species is not abundant in the southern part of its range. For example, Colorado State University (<https://webdoc.agsci.colostate.edu/bspm/arthropodsofcolorado/Yellowjackets.pdf>) notes that “Most common is the western yellowjacket, *V. pensylvanica* (Sausurre), and the prairie yellowjacket, *V. atropilosa* (Sladen), and

North Carolina State University (<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/yellowjackets>) cites the eastern yellowjacket, *Vespula maculifrons*, and the southern yellowjacket, *Vespula squamosa*, as most abundant.

This analysis surely justifies assignment of the common name **northern yellowjacket** on a geographic basis.

## 7. Principal hosts (include references):

The species is free living, but stings humans and other vertebrates when disturbed.

## 8. Please provide multiple references indicating clearly that the proposed name is already established and ideally widespread in use. If the name has been newly coined for purposes of this application, please state so:

I found no usage of **northern yellowjacket** for *Vespula alascensis* on the internet, and this common name is not found in the scientific literature.

## 9. Please identify any common names in use, including those used by indigenous peoples in the insect's area of origin, that have been applied to this taxon, other than the one herein proposed, with references. Please briefly describe the methods used to find alternative names and, if necessary, justify why each alternate name is inadequate:

An internet search [[vespula alascensis common names - Search \(bing.com\)](#)] led to the following quote: "This species has many synonyms such as "**common wasp**", "**European wasp**", **Paravespula vulgaris**, or "**common yellow jacket**". However, a study from 2010 revealed that *Vespula vulgaris* and the American common yellow jacket are actually two different species, the latter now known as *Vespula alascensis*."

Other than common yellowjacket, the most common alternative common names that I found are **North American yellowjacket**, and **American yellowjacket**. Both appear to be attempts to distinguish the species *alascensis* from the European *vulgaris*. However, neither name is suitable because there are many other American and North American yellowjackets. I found three references to the **old world yellowjacket** from the state of Montana (<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/yellowjackets>), the University of Maine (<https://extension.umaine.edu/home-and-garden-ipm/fact-sheets/common-name-listing/hornets-wasps-and-yellowjackets/>), and the website "Picture Insect" ([Alaska yellowjacket \(Vespula alascensis\) - Picture Insect](#)), which are clearly erroneous.

Following the publication by Carpenter and Glare (2010), the name **Alaska yellowjacket** has been used many times to designate *Vespula alascensis*. Examples based on an internet search follow.

1. The bug guide ([Species Vespula alascensis - American Yellowjacket - BugGuide.Net](#)) refers to the species as the American yellowjacket (apparently reflecting the recent separation of the species from the European species, *Vespula vulgaris*), with alternative common names listed as **Alaska yellowjacket** and North American yellowjacket.
2. The website "10,000 Things of the Pacific Northwest" ([Vespula alascensis \(Alaska Yellowjacket\) – 10,000 Things of the Pacific Northwest \(10000thingsofthepnw.com\)](#)) refers to *Vespula alascensis* as the **Alaska yellowjacket**.
3. The website "iNaturalist" ([Alaska Yellowjacket \(Vespula alascensis\) · iNaturalist](#)) refers to *Vespula alascensis* as the **Alaska yellowjacket**.
4. The website "Picture Insect" ([Alaska yellowjacket \(Vespula alascensis\) - Picture Insect](#)) refers to *Vespula alascensis* as the **Alaska yellowjacket**, and gives an alternative common name as Old world yellowjacket.
5. The website "ThePetEnthusiast" ([65 Types of Wasps \(Pictures And Identification Guides\) \(thepetenthusiast.com\)](#)) refers to *Vespula alascensis* as the **Alaska yellowjacket**.

6. The website “Bird Watching HQ” ([3 Common Wasps & Hornets in Alaska \(ID Guide\) - Bird Watching HQ](#)) refers to *Vespula alascensis* as the **Alaska yellowjacket**.
7. The website “Encyclopedia of Life” (<https://eol.org/pages/51514333>) refers to *Vespula alascensis* as the **Alaska yellowjacket**.
8. The website “Lost Coast Outpost” (<https://lostcoastoutpost.com/nature/359/>) refers to *Vespula alascensis* as the **Alaska yellowjacket**.
9. The University of Maine Cooperative Extension (<https://extension.umaine.edu/home-and-garden-ipm/fact-sheets/common-name-listing/hornets-wasps-and-yellowjackets/>) refers to *Vespula alascensis* as the American yellowjacket or the **Alaska yellowjacket**.
10. The website “Wikidata” (<https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q21302098>) refers to *Vespula alascensis* as the **Alaska yellowjacket**.
11. The website “The BioFiles” (<https://www.thebiofiles.com/view/8749>) refers to *Vespula alascensis* as the **Alaska yellowjacket**.
12. The popular Canadian magazine “Maclean’s” (the Time Magazine of Canada) (<https://macleans.ca/multimedia/photo/paul-parent-photography-insects/#gallery/bugs-are-people-too/slide-1>) refers to *Vespula alascensis* as the **Alaska yellowjacket** in an article entitled “Bugs are people too”, Alicia Cox Thomson, August 23, 2021.
13. The website “flickr” (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/7519633@N08/48876370573>) refers to *Vespula alascensis* as the **Alaska yellowjacket**.
14. The website “gbif.org” (<https://www.gbif.org/species/6247225>) refers to *Vespula alascensis* as the **Alaska yellowjacket**.
15. An internet search for images ([vespula alascensis images - Bing images](#)) disclosed multiple images with the name **Alaska yellowjacket**.

The now incorrect designation “**common yellowjacket**” persists for the new species *alascensis*, accentuating the need for a new common name. An internet search for “common yellowjacket” produced 4,210 hits. Examples based on this search follow.

1. Wikipedia ([Vespula alascensis - Wikipedia](#)) incorrectly assigns **common yellowjacket** to the species *alascensis*.
2. In the online “Checklist of the Yellowjacket and Paper Wasps of British Columbia, Revised Version, October 2018” ([Checklist of the Yellowjacket and Paper Wasps of British Columbia \(ubc.ca\)](#), Rob Cannings, Curator Emeritus of Entomology, Royal BC Museum, acknowledges the separation of *Vespula alascensis* from *Vespula vulgaris*, but retains the now invalid name **common yellowjacket**.
3. Sterling International, Spokane, WA, the vendor of the best-selling “Rescue” yellowjacket traps in North America (<https://www.rescue.com/bugs/yellowjackets/common-yellowjacket/>) incorrectly assigns **common yellowjacket** to *Vespula alascensis*.
4. The website “Techletter.com” (<https://www.techletter.com/Top%2010%20pests/yellowjacket.html>) incorrectly assigns **common yellowjacket** to *Vespula alascensis*.
5. In an authoritative chapter, Reed and Landolt (2019) acknowledge the separation of *Vespula alascensis* from *Vespula vulgaris* but retain the now invalid name **common yellowjacket**.
6. In a 2023 extension publication for Christmas tree growers, Oregon State university (<https://pubs.extension.oregonstate.edu/em9093/yellowjacket>) incorrectly assigns **common yellowjacket** to *Vespula alascensis*.
7. The San Mateo County, CA, Mosquito and Vector Control District (<https://www.smcmvcd.org/yellowjacket-identification>) incorrectly assigns **common yellowjacket** to *Vespula alascensis*.
8. The website “PestWeb” (<https://pestweb.com/pests/1034/common-yellowjacket>) incorrectly assigns **common yellowjacket** to *Vespula alascensis*.

There is further need for clarity and a new common name. Many universities and other jurisdictions (not documented herein) are unaware of Carpenter and Gare (2010) and incorrectly retain both the scientific name *Vespula vulgaris* and the common name **common yellowjacket**. In one extraordinary example in a 2012 extension publication, Shetler et al. of Ohio State University (<https://ohioline.osu.edu/factsheet/HYG-2075-1>) incorrectly assign **common yellowjacket** to the outdated genus and species *Paravespula vulgaris*.

**10. Please identify any other organisms to which your proposed common name could apply, giving careful consideration to closely related taxa. Please justify why the proposed common name is (i) unsuitable for each of those taxa and/or (ii) better suited for the proposed taxon:**

On entering the words “northern yellowjacket” into an internet search engine, one finds 126 hits. I found several mentions of northern aerial yellowjackets, northern yellowjackets and northern red-banded yellowjacket for *Dolichovespula norvegicoides*. These are clear misnomers. Akre et al. (1980) assign no common name to *D. norvegicoides* but Akre et al. (1980) and the ESA do assign the common name aerial yellowjacket to *Dolichovespula arenaria*. I did find a few confusing references to northern yellowjacket for the obligate social parasite *Dolichovespula arctica*, which has an almost identical range as *Vespula alascensis* and for which Akre et al. (1980) assign no common name. There were also numerous references to the Yellowjacket Invitational track meet.

Other than the common names already assigned to yellowjackets by the ESA and my proposals for **northern and southern yellowjackets**, I foresee no further need for new common names. All other species in the genera *Vespula* and *Dolichovespula* are either non-pestiferous or seldom draw human attention. There would be little or no incentive to erect common names for these species.

**11. Please document your efforts to consult with entomologists (including taxonomic specialists), colleagues, or other professionals who work with the taxon as to the suitability and need for the proposed common name. Please note that this is an important element of your proposal; proposals that do not document these steps are less likely to be successful.**

Letters from Michael Rust, University of California, Riverside, a noted authority on biology and management of yellowjackets (supporting common names for both “northern” and “southern” yellowjackets), and Sonal Nagla, proprietor of Red Fox Exterminating, a British Columbia pest control company, are attached to the e-mail message of submission.

## REFERENCES CITED

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**Proposed by:** John H. Borden (Emeritus Gold ESA member)

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Dr. John H. Borden  
Principal Consultant, JHB Consulting  
6552 Carnegie Street  
Burnaby, BC, V5B 1Y3, Canada

10 November 2023

Dear Dr. Borden,

I was disappointed to learn that the ESA Common Names Committee rejected your proposal to award the common name Alaskan yellowjacket to the species *Vespula alascensis*.

After reviewing your proposal for the alternative common name, I understand the reasons for the rejection and am pleased to endorse your new proposal for the common name "northern yellowjacket."

Part of our company's business in British Columbia deals with yellowjackets, including the "northern yellowjacket", which at times can reach very high numbers. When describing a pest problem to a client, it is always advantageous to be able to use a correct common name. This avoids confusion and allows an interested client to search for further information without needing to get into the complexity of scientific names in Latin.

Thanks so much for reaching out to me once again.

Sincerely,

A photograph of a handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored surface. The signature reads "Sonal Nagla" in a cursive script.

Sonal Nagla, BCE  
President – Red Fox Exterminating Ltd.





Department of Entomology - 041  
College of Natural and Agricultural Sciences

November 9, 2023

John H. Borden, PhD  
Principal Consultant, JHB Consulting  
Professor Emeritus, Simon Fraser University

Dear Dr. Borden:

Thank you for taking the time to propose these two common names of yellowjackets found in North America. I strongly support the adoption of both common names. It would be especially helpful in the case of *Vespula alascensis* which was incorrectly identified as *Vespula vulgaris* for years.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael K. Rust". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Michael K. Rust  
Distinguished Professor of Entomology  
and the Graduate School