



## 'Ultra-rare' blue bees found in Florida. It's been years since they were last seen.

By Joel Shannon, USA TODAY

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Florida Museum of Natural History researcher Chase Kimmel found a blue calamintha bee on March 9, according to an emailed statement from Kimmel. It was the first time one had been spotted since 2016, the museum says.

Researchers in Florida have rediscovered an "ultra-rare" metallic blue bee that hadn't been spotted in years – so long that experts weren't sure it still existed.

Florida Museum of Natural History researcher Chase Kimmel found a blue calamintha bee on March 9, according to an emailed statement from Kimmel. It was the first time one had been spotted since 2016, the museum says.

"We observed a shiny little blue bee grabbing (an Ashe's calamintha flower) and rubbing its head on the top portion of the flower 2-3 times," Kimmel's statement says. That behavior is unusual and a unique characteristic of the blue calamintha bee: "We were pretty shocked to see it."

Since then, more of the elusive bees have been spotted, but efforts to research the insect have been curtailed by the coronavirus pandemic, Kimmel said.

'Agitated' alligator removed from Florida road; FWC warns against touching gators after motorist's close call

The blue calamintha bee – or *Osmia calaminthae* – has unusual facial hairs that are used to collect pollen, the museum said in a release.

It's a unique insect for a number of reasons, Kimmel said: It collects pollen on its face, relies on a threatened flowering plant and is found primarily in a habitat in central Florida: Lake Wales Ridge.

That region has an ancient history, the museum says: “When much of the state was underwater, higher elevation sand dune areas along the Central Florida ridge behaved almost like islands, producing isolated habitats,” according to the release.

The region is a threatened ecosystem that is quickly disappearing, the release says.

Even though help was limited during the pandemic, Kimmel says he’s scouted multiple sites looking for the solitary bee, which the museum says creates individual nests rather than hives.

The bees had previously been found in four locations, Kimmel said. After extensive survey work primarily on protected state lands, researchers now have spotted the bees on ten properties, which significantly expands their known footprint.

But it was no easy task.

“Even though I have found the bee in multiple sites it took hours and sometimes days to find even one bee,” Kimmel said.

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