

Proposal for FLY Emoji

By: Athena Dang (athenadang101@gmail.com), Justin Bai (justin_bai@brown.edu)
9 August 2018

1. Abstract

In this proposal, we are advocating for the inclusion of the FLY emoji. The fly is a ubiquitous insect as well as a popular symbol. Although several emojis depicting insects exist or have been approved (cricket, ant, honeybee, lady beetle, butterfly, mosquito), an emoji representing the fly is lacking. Nevertheless, the fly is a common creature found around the world and perhaps may even be considered the exemplar flying insect.

As a representation of an insect found virtually all over the world, the FLY emoji is anticipated to be used by people across the globe.

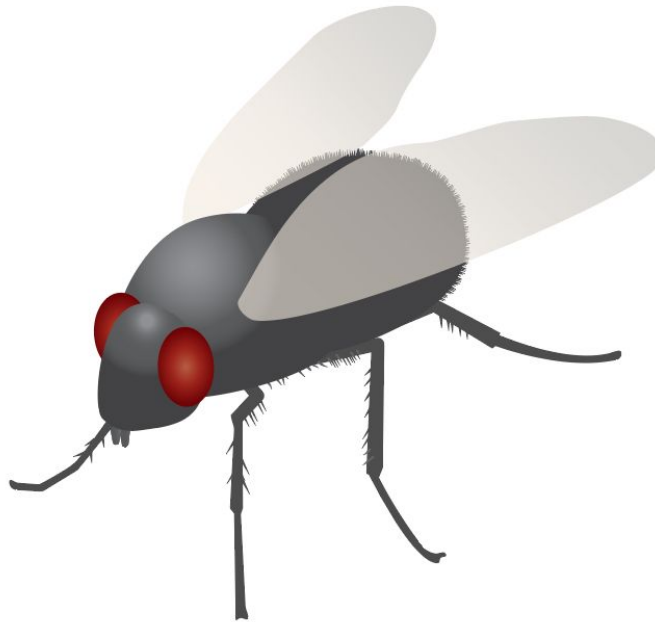


Image credit: Rebecca Blaesing

2. Introduction

Flies and humans have cohabitated together since the dawn of humanity. Our fly housemates have always shared our dining tables and living quarters. With over 120,000 identified species, the fly has been intertwined with daily life due to their sheer numbers.

While sharing our spaces with flies each and every day, they are widely considered intruders. Summers are plagued with even more of these uninvited guests. They hover about as we guard our meal from these insect vultures during family picnics, show up dead in restaurant soups, and tickle our skin as

they lap up moisture during hot days. It is only appropriate to have an emoji for such a universal animal that has lived alongside us and bothered us for centuries.

Flies have been a persistent symbol and have been referenced throughout historical and modern literature as well. From ancient Mesopotamian lore to modern folk tales, the fly has been a representation of death, disgust and rot¹—even appearing on ancient Babylonian and Mesopotamian jewelry to represent a death god.² Today, we see the use usage of the fly expand outwards from such dark implications. For example, we see such references in the title of William Golding’s novel *Lord of the Flies*. Flies today are now used to also symbolize large quantities of items, small stature or size, and even used in speech to describe someone who is annoying, nosy or overbearing. With such an important role that flies have, it seems only appropriate to have an emoji to represent them.

3. Names

Fly

Flying insect

4. Factors for Inclusion

A. Compatibility

The Viber Messenger app contains a custom emoji set, with many of the custom emojis having analogues with Unicode emojis. However, a few additional images are present, including a custom emoji representing a fly.



Copyright © Viber Media S.à r.l. 2018 All Rights Reserved

A screenshot showing a fragment of the custom emojis available on Viber Messenger. The fly can be seen in the upper right.

B. Expected Usage Level

Frequency

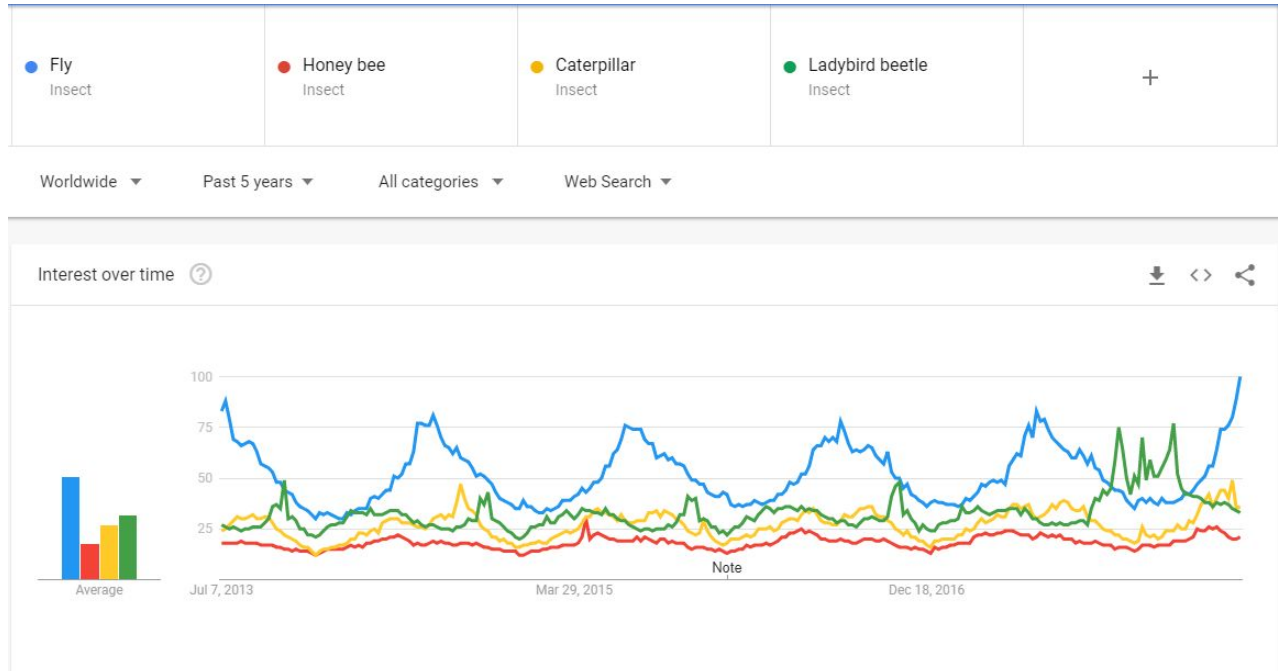
Google Trends

Since flies have a constant presence in the daily life of humans we expect the usage of the FLY emoji to reflect their existence. For instance, Google Trends show that the fly is highly competitive with the honey bee, caterpillar, and ladybird beetle. Note that care was put in to ensure that the category

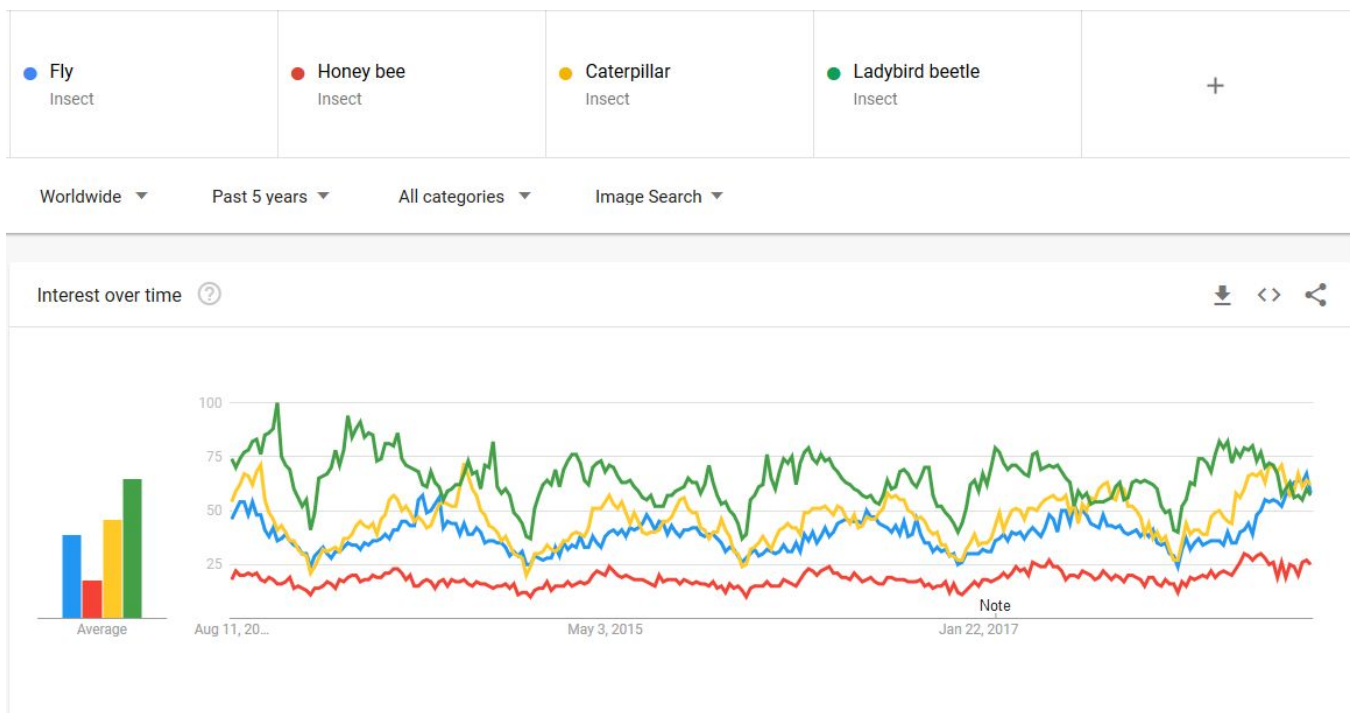
¹ Jeremy A. Black, Anthony Green, and Tessa Rickards, *Gods, Demons, and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 2014).

² Black, Green, and Rickards, *Gods, Demons, and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*.

“insect” was selected for each search term in the figure below. Interestingly, we see a periodic peak in the trend for the web search “fly” during the summer months of the northern hemisphere.



As for Image Search on Google Trends (shown below), though we see that *fly* is not the number one interest in the selected search terms, it is still more searched for than *honey bee* and is closely matched by *caterpillar*.

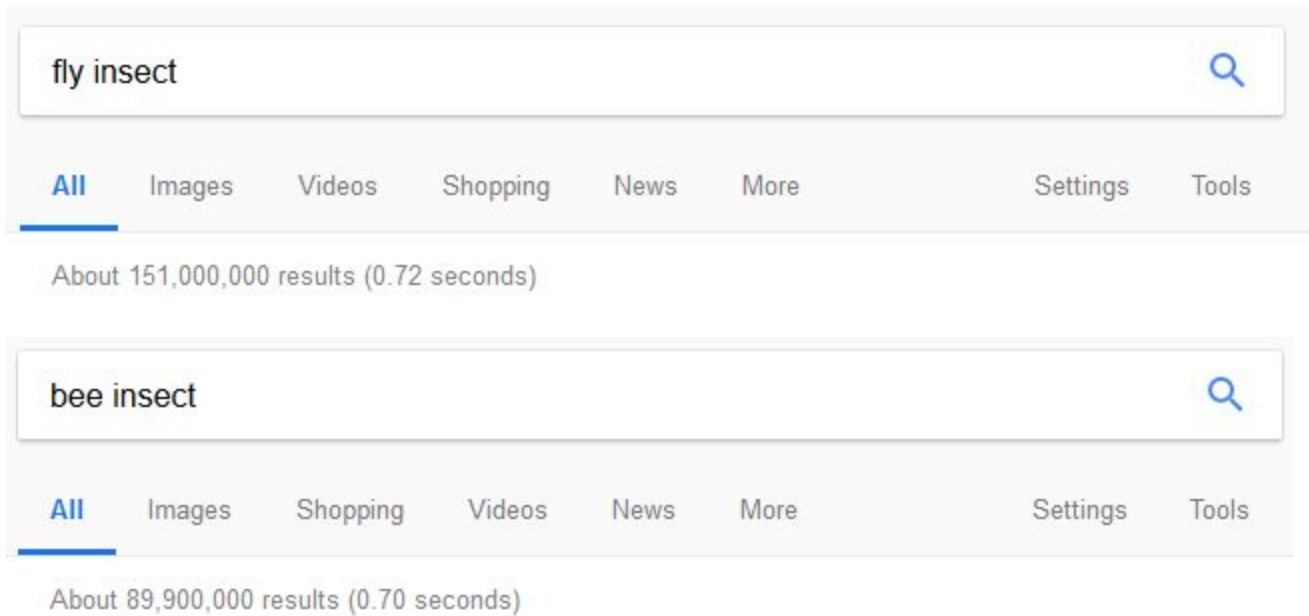


One difficulty in assessing the frequency of results about flies (when a provided category like “insect” is not given like in Google Trends above) is that the word *fly* is polysemous and homophonous, and can

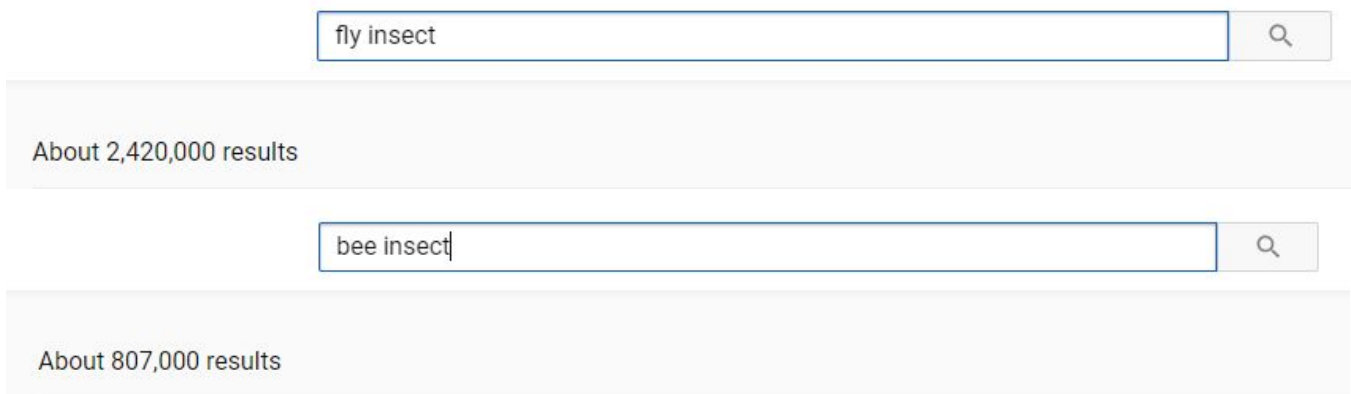
reflect a wide range of meanings aside from the insect, such as the verb *to fly*, the *fly* of one's pants, and the slang term *fly* (meaning stylish or fashionable). For the purposes of this proposal, the workaround is to gather search data with the search term *fly insect*.

Google Search

Below we see a comparison of Google search results for *fly insect* and *bee insect*. (*Bee insect*, rather than simply *bee*, was searched as *bee* is also polysemous, referring to a gathering as in *quilting bee* and *spelling bee*. In addition, this keeps the search terms parallel.) There are 151,000,000 results for *fly insect* and 89,900,000 results fo *bee insect*. (Search was conducted on 9 August 2018.)



YouTube Search

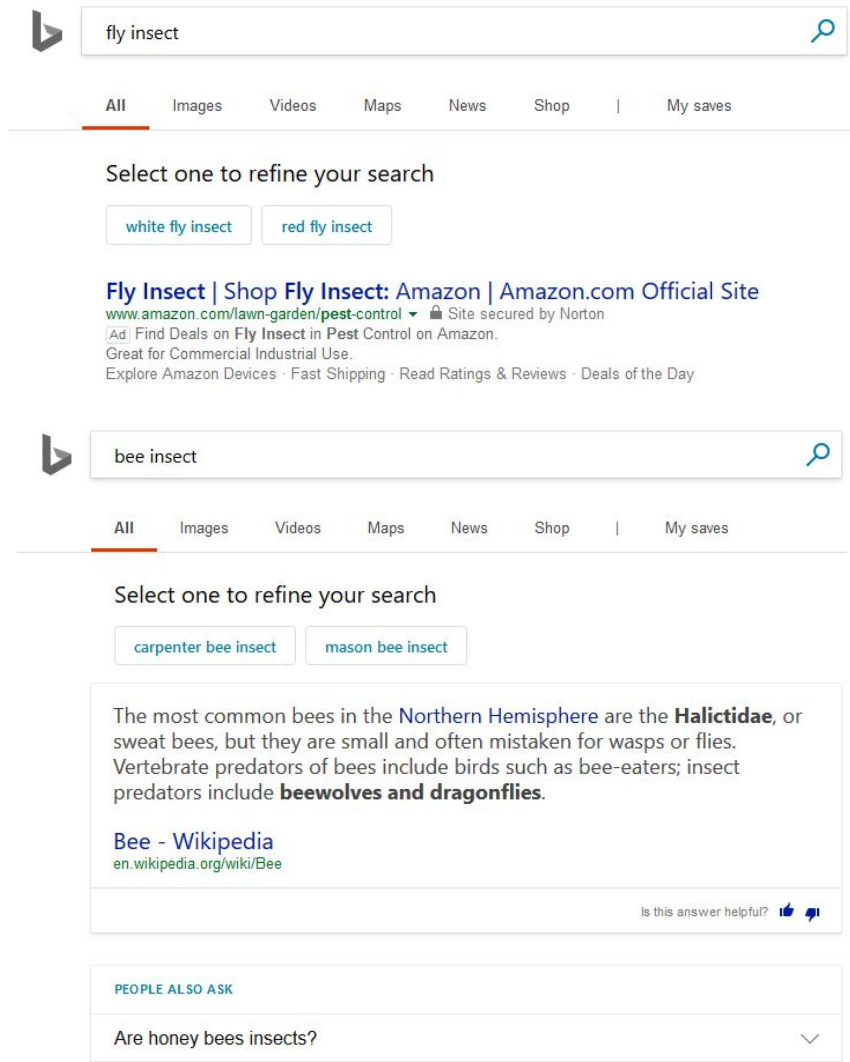


On YouTube, there are 2,420,000 results for *fly insect* and 807,000 results for *bee insect*, suggesting that the videos about flies outnumber those about bees. (Search was conducted on 9 August 2018.)

Bing Search

Unfortunately, for some reason that is mysterious to us, Bing does not provide the number of search results for the terms *fly insect* and *bee insect* (as demonstrated below). (There is an option to "select one to refine your search" which provides "refinements" that do not seem relevant for our purposes; in

any case, selecting one of the “refinements” does not actually provide a search results page with the number of results either.)



Multiple Usages

While a FLY emoji may be used to simply represent a fly, there are many associations that the fly has, which would lend the emoji to other usages.

For example, flies are often associated with rotting and waste products. As such, the FLY emoji may be used to suggest a stinky smell or an unsanitary condition. The FLY emoji may also be used to represent death, disease, or decomposition.

The common fruit fly (*Drosophila melanogaster*) also is an important symbol in genetic research as much scientific research has relied on experiments involving the the fruit fly.

In addition, there are many expressions that involve flies, such as *fly on the wall*, *a fly in the ointment*, *dropping like flies*, and *wouldn't hurt a fly*. The FLY emoji may also creatively be used to refer to the slang term *fly*, which means stylish or fashionable.

Emotional Content

The FLY emoji may be used to evoke negative emotions. Since flies are considered pests, the FLY emoji may be used to evoke feelings of being annoyed. In addition, because of the fly's association with rotting and waste products, the emoji may be used with feelings of disgust.

Use in Sequences

The FLY emoji can indeed be used in sequences. For example, the FLY emoji may be used with the PILE OF POO emoji in order to represent a particularly smelly or stinky condition. (Notably, Android used to display the PILE OF POO emoji with flies before it switched to the smiling appearance.) The emoji may also be used with certain fruit emojis to suggest the fruit fly in particular. Moreover, there may be some more creative uses for the emoji. For example, the FLY emoji may be used in conjunction with the FISHING POLE AND FISH emoji to denote fly fishing, a type of fishing that uses an artificial fly as the bait.

Image Distinctiveness

The fly, with its typically translucent glossy wings, would be distinctive as an emoji. The shape and coloration of the wings distinguish it clearly from the BUTTERFLY emoji, which many vendors display with either blue or orange wings, and the LADY BEETLE emoji, which has the instantly recognizable red with black spots. The closest emoji to the FLY emoji would be the HONEYBEE emoji. However, the FLY emoji would not have the yellow and black stripes that are so closely associated with the bee (nor would the FLY emoji have a stinger). This difference in coloration in particular would make the FLY emoji distinct from the HONEYBEE emoji.

Completeness

Whereas the Unicode set contains winged insects such as the butterfly, honeybee, and ladybug, the lack of the fly (perhaps one of the most notable exemplars when it comes to flying insects) seems to be an unfortunate hiatus.

E. Frequently Requested



Kevin Pietersen ✓

@KP24

Follow

Desperately looking for a fly emoji...

2:37 PM - 1 Jan 2018

10 Retweets 449 Likes



35

10

449

<https://twitter.com/KP24/status/947960103486996480>

Many users have taken to social media to muse about the existence of the FLY emoji (or rather, the lack thereof). Even Ryan Phillippe noted that there should be a FLY emoji.



dr. philz ✓
@RyanPhillippe

Follow

there should be a fly emoji

12:18 AM - 4 Mar 2017

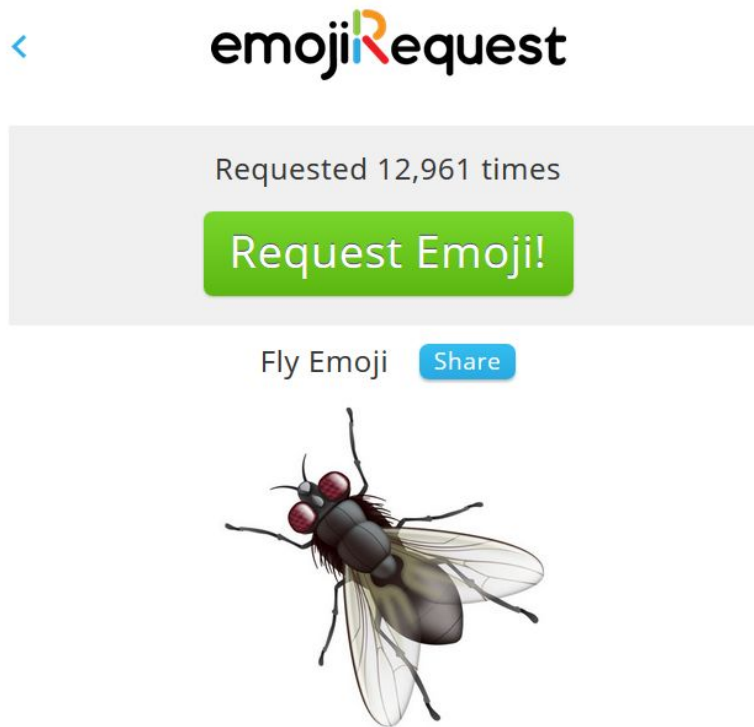
27 Retweets 136 Likes



21 27 136

<https://twitter.com/RyanPhillippe/status/837940210725900288>

Moreover, the site Emoji Request shows that the FLY emoji has been requested almost 13,000 times.



<https://www.emojirequest.com/r/FlyEmoji>

5. Factors for Exclusion

Overly Specific

The FLY emoji is not overly specific, this compound-eyed, hairy, and winged insect is widely recognized across the globe. While there are over 125,000 different species of fly³, almost every variation of fly

³ Mayhew, P. J. (2007), Why are there so many insect species? Perspectives from fossils and phylogenies. *Biological Reviews*, 82: 425-454. doi:10.1111/j.1469-185X.2007.00018.x

shows unifying characteristics in appearance, and an emoji representation suffices to get the universal idea across to any receiver.

Open Ended

The fly is an iconic winged organism that is not currently included within the emoji lexicon.

Already Representable

We do not deny the existence of other winged insects available as emojis in the current database. The closest emoji representations to the fly are the honey bee, the mosquito, and even the ladybug. However, they simply do not do the idea of a fly justice. For instance, the HONEYBEE emoji is clearly not a fly because of the bright yellow bands on its abdomen, long antennae and its noticeable stinger. A mosquito is also visibly inadequate because of its gangly appearance and long needle mouth. Even further from the fly aesthetic is the ladybug whose circular body and bright red, polka dot wings make it an inadequate representation of that classic fly look. Thus, the humble fly's dark color with unmistakable large, compound eyes has yet to receive the proper representation it deserves. Below are examples that illustrate the series of burdensome clarifications users must go through in order to accurately portray the fly when no emoji exists for it. These users digress that these alternative emojis are clearly not flies in their attempts to use the other winged insect emojis to represent the fly.



• @ChristiLukasiak · 21 Jul 2016

The **fly** in my house is going to set me over the edge 🐝🐝🐝 (no **fly emoji**)

12 41 484

<https://twitter.com/ChristiLukasiak/status/756238481572171777>



Doughy DJ @mynamesdj · 10 Jan 2017

This **fly** followed me from the kitchen to my room. He honestly cares more about me than anyone has in years. ❤️ u bb 🐝🐝 also y no **fly emoji**?

6 33

<https://twitter.com/mynamesdj/status/819055031475240961>

Logos, brands, UI icons, signage, specific people, deities

Flies often appear as cartoons in clip art and sometimes in pest control technology. However, the fly itself is not trademarked because it is an animal.

Transient

The fly is a ubiquitous creature, found on all continents except Antarctica. Flies have been around for hundreds of millions years⁴ (predating the first humans) and there does not seem to be any indication that they will be going away any time soon.

⁴ Yeates, D. K., R. Meier, and B. M. Wiegmann. "Phylogeny of true flies (Diptera): a 250 million year old success story in terrestrial diversification." (2003).

Faulty Comparison

The only real competition with the fly is the bee in terms of its shared class of insecta and insect-like body.⁵ However, besides the shared classification and overall body shape, the similarities between bees and flies cease. The bee is not mistakable for the fly due to its bright yellow-striped abdomen, long antennae and stinger. Flies are much darker, have large (often red) bulging eyes, more hairiness, and negative connotations in society. Since a fly's universal implications differ entirely from any withstanding emoji, this makes the fly a meaningful and novel addition to the emoji insect collection.

6. Sort Location

Category: Animal-Bugs

The FLY emoji may come before HONEY BEE, thereby introducing common winged insects.

7. Other Character Properties

The other character properties are suggested to be defined as follows.

General Category: So

Canonical Combining Class: 0

Bidirectional Class: ON

Decomposition Type: Decomposition Mapping:

Numeric Type:

Numeric Value:

Bidirectional Mirrored: N Unicode 1 Name:

ISO Comment:

Simple Uppercase Mapping: Simple Lowercase Mapping: Simple Titlecase Mapping:

8. Author Bios

Athena Dang is a student at UCLA, and she thinks often about the flies that make their presence known during the summer months. Justin Bai is a student at Brown University, and one of his favorite poems is "The Fly" by William Blake.

⁵ http://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Apis_mellifera/classification/