



About bumblebees

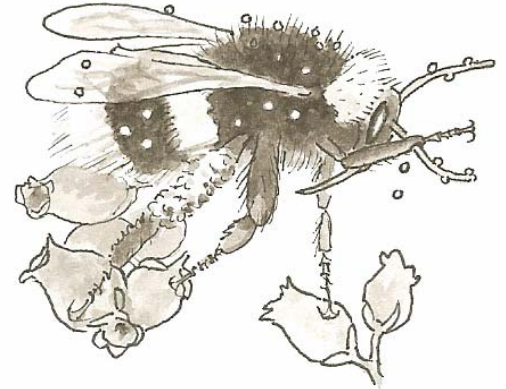
Bumblebees are among the most endearing and familiar of garden insects. The sight and sound of bees droning methodically from flower to flower is a quintessential part of a summer's day. Sadly, these affable insects are struggling to survive in a modern world of habitat loss, pesticides and intensive agriculture. However, you can help them! Why not ask for some leaflets about what you can do to conserve bumblebees in your own garden.

What are bumblebees?

Bumblebees are the large, very furry and often brightly coloured insects that are familiar visitors to our gardens. They belong to a group of insects called the Hymenoptera, which also includes the wasps, ants and bees, all of which are characterised by a nipped-in waist.

Bumblebees are adapted to colder climates and are therefore predominantly found in the northern hemisphere, in temperate, montane and sub-arctic regions. There are about 250 known species of bumblebee worldwide, 25 of which are native to the UK. Unfortunately, three of the UK's species are already extinct, two are critically endangered and several more are heading that way, unless we act quickly!

Please turn over for some bumblebee facts!



Are they different to honeybees?

Yes! Although closely related, they are very different.

Bumblebees are native to the UK, whereas the one species of honeybee found in the UK is domesticated.

Honeybees also look very different, being much smaller, drabber coloured and less hairy than their vibrantly coloured and furry bumblebee cousins.

Bumblebee Facts

Life Cycle

Bumblebees are social insects. They live in a nest of up to 400 individuals, ruled by a queen. After hibernating throughout the winter, the queen emerges in spring to start a new nest. She lays several batches of eggs throughout the summer, which she sits on and incubates by shivering her flight muscles to generate enough heat to keep them close to 30°C. These eggs develop into the female workers, whose job it is to feed and nurture the colony.

Towards the end of the summer the queen produces male offspring, along with new queens. After mating, the males die off, as do the old queen and workers. Only the new, fertilised queens survive to hibernate through the winter, in order to start nests of their own the following spring.

Bumblebees do produce honey! However, they only produce it in very small amounts, unlike honeybees, which produce enough honey for humans to harvest.

Bumblebees are not at all aggressive, and will only sting if they feel very threatened. Only the females can sting.

Bumblebees have smelly feet! After feeding, they leave a chemical scent on the flower to warn other bumblebees to avoid that flower because the nectar has already been taken.

Bumblebees eat nectar and pollen and may fly over a mile from their nest to find food.

Different bumblebee species have different length tongues, which suit them to visiting different flowers. So, several species can happily live alongside one another, provided a range of different flowers are present.

Bumblebee Conservation Trust

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