



Bumblebees of Kent



Bumblebees and the Garden of England – What makes Kent so important?

The UK has 24 species of bumblebee. Seven of these are classed as rare or scarce and have shown population declines. The main reason for this decline is the loss of habitat; 97% of our wildflower meadows have been lost since the 1930's. Kent is one of the best counties in the UK for bumblebee species with 22 of the 24 UK species being found here. Much of Kent's cultural and economic heritage is intrinsically linked to bees, with a landscape of orchards, arable flowering crops and grassland. Kent's bumblebee diversity can be linked to its varied habitats and the milder southern climate.

Many rare and scarce bumblebees call Kent their home, however these populations are often isolated and may be at risk of extinction unless action is taken. The Shril carder bee, one of the UK's rarest bumblebees, is found along the north Kent coastline and is a focus for conservation effort.



(above) Oare Marsh;
(right) Foreness Point



MAKING A BUZZ FOR THE COAST

Photo credits:
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Design by Tim Griffiths Illustration.

Partners
Kent Wildlife Trust, Kent County Council, Natural England, RSPB, Swale Borough Council, Thanet District Council, Thames Water.

Follow us on

Check out our events page for identification courses, guided walks and other community events going on in your local area!

Visit the Bumblebee Conservation Trust website at www.bumblebeeconservation.org

Making a Buzz for the Coast received National Lottery Heritage funding, thanks to National Lottery players.



Want to know more?

Visit our website for bumblebee identification resources and more information on how to record bumblebees. You can also find tips on what you can do for bumblebees in your own garden and local green spaces.



What are carder bumblebees?

These species, nesting in areas of long vegetation such as tussocky grass, share a habit of combing ('carding') together material such as grass and moss to build a cover for their nest. Four of the carder bumblebee species are rare and only one is widespread throughout the UK – the **Common carder bee** (*Bombus pascuorum*). The rarer species are associated with extensive areas of open flower-rich grassland. Unlike the Common carder bee, which emerges from March, carder bee species tend to emerge from hibernation later from April/May.

Recording bumblebees

We strongly recommend taking photographs of bumblebees you find in order to help identify and to confirm sightings. Try to take several photographs from different angles, showing banding, face, legs and tail. One of the best places to record wildlife is iRecord (www.brc.ac.uk/irecord). Here you can record ad hoc bumblebee records (ideally with pictures). Visit our website at www.bumblebeeconservation.org, to learn more about submitting records and surveying for bumblebees.



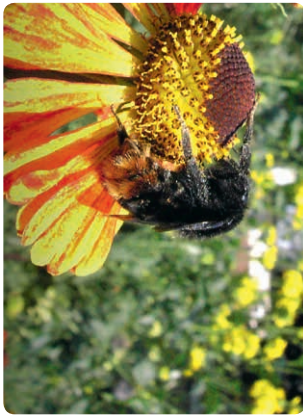
To take bumblebee ID a step further, you will probably need to net and pot the bee for closer examination, and use a hand lens to see features close up. Whilst a large proportion of bumblebees can be identified in the field, in the case of some rare bumblebees, field identification may not be possible.

BeeWalk

If you enjoy bee identification and can spare a few hours once a month between March and October to walk a set route, why not join our national survey BeeWalk. You could be contributing to a much needed database of bumblebee records to help us monitor all bumblebee species and in turn aid their conservation. Visit www.bumblebeeconservation.org/surveys/.



Forest cuckoo bumblebee (*Bombus sylvestris*)



Red-tailed cuckoo bumblebee (*Bombus rufipes*)



Southern cuckoo bumblebee (*Bombus vestalis*)

Cuckoo bumblebees, much like the bird, lay their eggs in the nest of a social bumblebee host where the workers of the host rear the young. Eggs laid by the cuckoo female only produce breeding males and females, however do not produce workers. As there are no workers, cuckoo bumblebees have no pollen baskets and do not collect pollen. Female cuckoo bumblebees tend to emerge later than their host so they can lay their eggs in an established nest. The cuckoo will often appear similar to their host, however they tend to appear less furry exposing the shiny exoskeleton. Cuckoo bumblebees will often have smoky black/darkened wings.

What are cuckoo bumblebees?

Identifying bumblebees

Kent is a very special county for its diversity of bumblebees. The following species are widespread throughout Kent and the UK. These are the most common bumblebees you will frequently find in your gardens and greenspaces!

	Q	White-tailed bumblebee <i>Bombus lucorum</i>		W			M	
	Q	Garden bumblebee <i>Bombus hortorum</i>		W			M	
	Q	Tree bumblebee <i>Bombus hypnorum</i>		W			M	
	Q	Buff-tailed bumblebee <i>Bombus terrestris</i>		W			M	
	Q	Early bumblebee <i>Bombus pratorum</i>		W			M	
	Q	Red-tailed bumblebee <i>Bombus lapidarius</i>		W			M	
	Q	Common carder bee <i>Bombus pascuorum</i>		W			M	

Key
Q Queen
W Worker
M Male

Rare & scarce bumblebees of Kent

Brown-banded carder bee

Bombus humilis



Description

An all-inger bumblebee. Queens, males and workers are all similar in appearance and often have a darker brown band on the abdomen which is the same colour as the hairs on

the top of the thorax. There are no black hairs on the abdomen of this species but there are always a small number of black hairs on the thorax, usually at the wing bases.

Similar species

Common carder bee (*B. pascuorum*), Moss carder bee (*B. muscorum*).

Moss carder bee

Bombus muscorum



Description

An all-inger bumblebee. When fresh, this species has a distinctive chestnut-coloured thorax which contrasts with paler blonde hairs on the sides. There are no black hairs anywhere on the

body of this species. Queens start to emerge from May with workers seen from June onwards.

Confusion species

Brown-banded (*B. humilis*) and Common carder bees (*B. pascuorum*).

Red-shanked bumblebee

Bombus ruderarius



Description

This scarce species is very similar to the common Red-tailed bumblebee (*B. lapidarius*) as both are black with a red tail. Red-shanked bumblebee queens and workers have red hairs on the

hind leg rather than black giving them the name 'red-shanked'. The tail is also a paler, orange-red.

Similar species

Red-tailed bumblebees (*B. lapidarius*) and male Shrill carder bees (*B. sylvarum*).

Thames Estuary

An open landscape of grazing marshes and varied brownfield sites, linked by sea walls that provide an important corridor for rare bumblebees.

Cliffe Pools, Hoo Peninsula



Thames Estuary

Mitton Creek Country Park



Leysdown

Isle of Sheppey



South Swale Reserve & Saltwater Sea Walk

Margate

Ramsgate

Sandwich Bay

Dover

Folkestone

Dungeness

Rye

Dungeness & Romney Marsh

Kent Downs AONB

High Weald AONB

Ruderal bumblebee

Bombus ruderatus



Description

One of the larger bumblebee species in the UK and can occur in a number of colour forms. In the lighter colour form, queens, workers and males are three banded with a yellow-

black-yellow banded thorax, a yellow band at the top of the abdomen and a pure white tail. However, bee-aware, this species also produces darker or all black individuals.

Similar species

Garden bumblebees (*B. hortorum*), Short-haired bumblebee (*B. subterraneus*).

Favourite forage for rare and scarce bumblebees

Having long tongues is common in our rare and scarce bumblebee species, which can often be found foraging on similar flowers:

Red clover, red bartsia, bird's-foot trefoil, black horehound, knapweed, pea, dead nettle, yellow iris, comfrey and viper's bugloss.

Sheppey

A mosaic of wetland, marshes and farming land providing forage and long grass nesting habitat for bumblebees.

Shrill carder bee

Bombus sylvarum



Description

This is a pale, straw-coloured bumblebee, with a broad black band across the thorax and a reddish-orange tail which can fade with age. The Shrill carder as the name might

suggest also has a noticeably higher-pitched 'shrill' buzz than other bumblebees. Emerging later than many other bumblebees, you are most likely to see queens from May onwards. Workers appear from mid-June and males and new queens can be seen well into September. This is one of the UK's most endangered bumblebee species.

Similar species

Newly-emerged individuals are very distinctive. Older, faded individuals can resemble a number of other bumblebee species including Early bumblebees (*B. pratorum*), which also has a red tail but has much brighter yellow banding.

Thanet

Chalk soils and cliffs provide excellent habitat for both bumblebee and solitary bees.

Short-haired bumblebee

Bombus subterraneus



Description

Females and males have different colour patterns. Females have two yellow bands on the thorax, a top abdominal band and a white tail. Males are lemon

yellow with a black band between the wing bases. Formerly widespread across Southern England, this species underwent drastic declines and was last seen in the UK in 1988 at Dungeness. A reintroduction project began in 2009, and began releasing queens obtained from Sweden in 2012 until 2016. Population numbers are now being closely monitored in order to determine whether this species has successfully re-established.

Similar species

Males similar to Field cuckoo bumblebee (*B. campestris*). Queens and workers similar to the Ruderal bumblebee (*B. ruderatus*).

Dungeness & Romney Marsh

An area of shingle and clay with mixed arable and livestock farming. This area has two thirds of the UK's wildflower species.

