

Managing your land... for bumblebees

Bumblebees are hard-working and versatile pollinators, and hence provide an important service to agriculture. They are also key to maintaining Britain's biodiversity as so many wild plants depend upon them for pollination.

The importance of bumblebees

Bumblebees are one of our most important pollinators. They pollinate many commercial crops, such as tomatoes, peas and apples, and can help to increase yields in self-fertile crops such as oilseed rape. Insect pollination is estimated to contribute over £400 million per annum to the UK economy and €14.2 billion annually to the EU economy.

Domesticated honeybees are also important pollinators, as are many other wild bee species, but honeybees are struggling (primarily due to diseases) so it is vital that we look after our wild bee populations now more than ever. Bumblebees are also active in colder weather and work longer hours than honeybees. In some situations, use of certain pesticides may be affecting both bumblebees and honeybees, although uncertainty remains.

Bumblebees also help to pollinate many wild plants, allowing them to reproduce. Without bumblebees and other insects, some of these plants would fail to produce seeds and would gradually disappear.

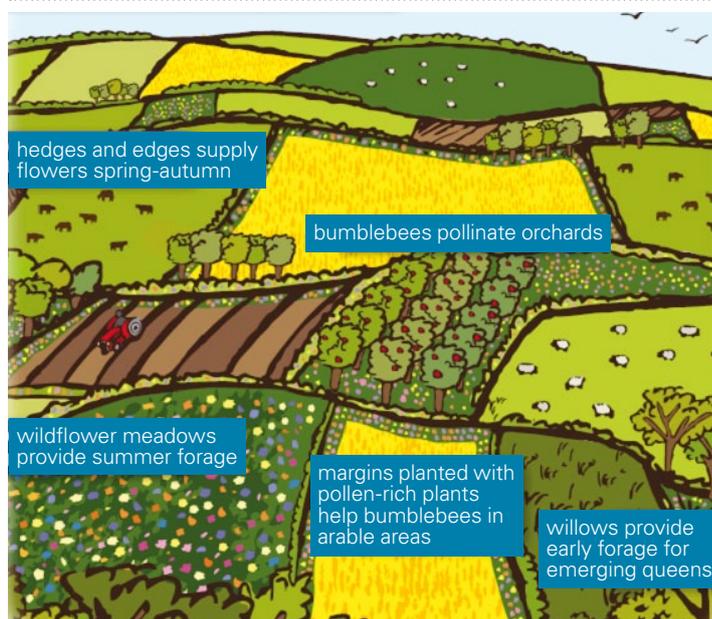


Crops such as runner beans, field beans, tomatoes, peppers, raspberries and strawberries are pollinated primarily by bumblebees.

Why conserve bumblebees?

Almost all of the UK's 24 species of bumblebee are thought to have declined in range or abundance, primarily due to habitat loss and changes in the way we farm. Flowers are now scarce in many landscapes, leaving bumblebees with little to feed on. Many species are now restricted to small nature reserves and habitat fragments, and sadly their future is very uncertain. Bumblebee nests need several hectares of flower-rich habitat, so populations restricted to small nature reserves are unlikely to survive for long – bad weather or inbreeding can quickly wipe out these small populations.

The only way we can boost bumblebee populations and prevent further extinctions is if large areas of the farmed countryside are managed sympathetically. Thankfully there are now viable, cost-neutral ways in which farmers and land managers can help provide habitats for bumblebees. And the benefits are mutual. Providing even small patches of flower-rich habitat around your land will make a real difference.



Bumblebee habitats throughout the farming landscape

The benefits to you

Managing your land for bumblebees is mutually beneficial – as well as providing a lifeline for these charming creatures it:

- Provides pollinators for arable and horticultural crops.
- Provides pollinators for orchards.
- Provides nutrient-rich grazing and hay.
- Reduces reliance on commercial pollinators.
- Encourages beneficial insects, providing natural pest control.
- Offers diversification benefits, e.g. tourism.
- Supports pollination of colourful hedgerow wildflowers.

How sensitive management can help

Bumblebees need pollen and nectar-rich flowers to provide them with a continuous supply of food throughout their nesting season from March through until September. They require high-quality pollen to feed to their young, which they can only get from certain plants – clovers, vetches and trefoils are particularly important. Flower-rich grasslands are the most important habitat for many of our rare bumblebees.

Bumblebees also require nesting sites. Some species prefer to nest above ground in thick vegetation, so hedgerows and areas of tussocky grass are valuable. Others nest underground, often using disused rodent holes, and can be catered for by leaving areas where rodents can create burrows (for example dry ditches or banks of earth).

Bumblebee Conservation Trust Factsheets

Our series of land management factsheets provides information about a variety of management options for different habitat types. The following chart demonstrates the degree of bumblebee-friendliness for these habitats. Further information can be found at bumblebeeconservation.org. Alternatively, your local BBCT Conservation Officer will be able to provide more detailed advice about bumblebee-friendly management on your land.



The ruderal bumblebee is one of many long-tongued species which are valuable and efficient pollinators of agricultural crops. Agri-environment schemes are helping it to make a comeback in farmland.

Habitat type	Bumblebee potential
Wildflower meadows	♥♥♥♥♥
Wildflower pastures	♥♥♥♥♥
Restored grassland	♥♥♥♥♥
Hedges and edges	♥♥♥♥
Coastal strips and seawalls	♥♥♥♥♥
Field margins	♥♥♥♥
Traditional orchards	♥♥♥♥
Brownfield and industrial land	♥♥♥♥♥
Heathlands	♥♥♥
Woodlands	♥♥
Community and amenity sites	♥♥♥♥
Machair	♥♥♥♥♥
Roadside verges	♥♥♥

Funding

Funding to support provision of some habitats may be available under agri-environment schemes or through local projects. If your land is in an agri-environment scheme please discuss any changes in management with your agreement advisor. For advice on how to manage your land sensitively for bumblebees please contact BBCT.

Get in touch

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