

Great yellow bumblebee

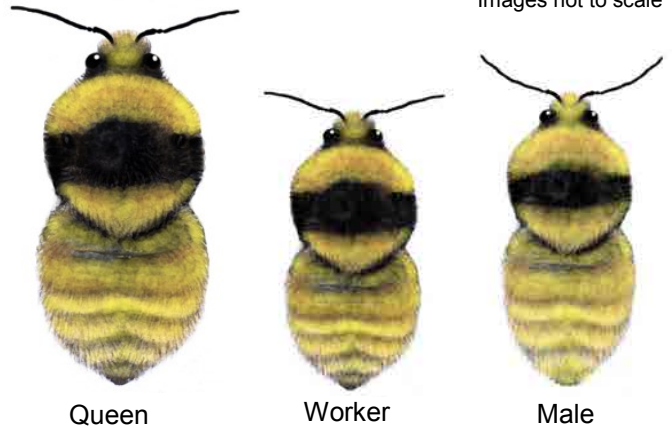
Bombus distinguendus

The Great yellow bumblebee can be identified by its yellow or yellowish-brown colouring with a distinct band of black hairs between the wings.

Workers are generally smaller than the queens and males are similar in size to workers.

Going, going, gone.....?

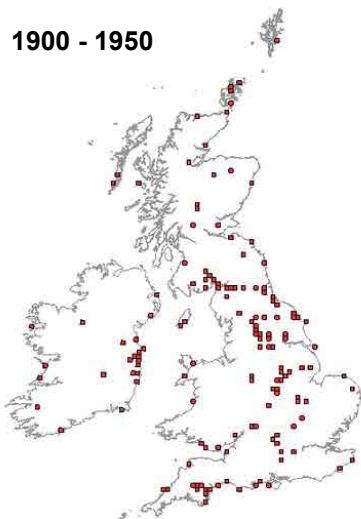
Our rarest bumblebee



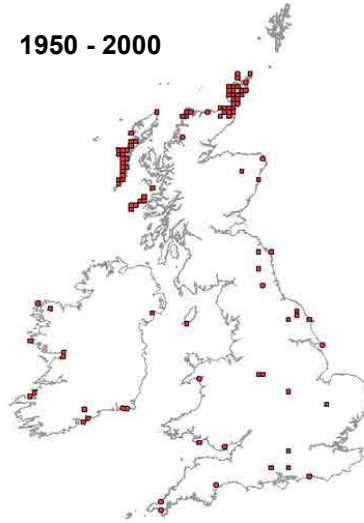
The distribution of Great yellow bumblebee has declined by 80% in the last century making it one of the UK's rarest bumblebees.

Changes in Great yellow bumblebee distribution from 1900 to 2012.

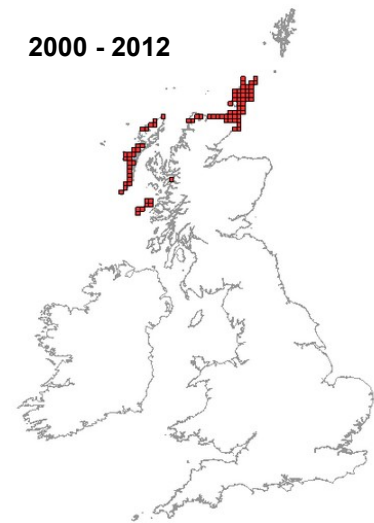
1900 - 1950



1950 - 2000



2000 - 2012



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Great yellow bumblebee is now only found in the north Highlands and the Islands of Scotland.

The last mainland populations are found in Caithness and Sutherland.

It has been a UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Species since 1997, becoming a UK BAP Priority Species in 2007. It has been on the Scottish Biodiversity List since 2005.

Causes of decline

The principle causes of decline are the loss of flower-rich meadows and the intensification of farming and grazing practices.

As a result the current distribution of Great yellow bumblebee reflects the distribution of flower-rich machair and locations where traditional crofting practices are still maintained.



Great yellow bumblebee on Red clover.

Lifecycle of the Great yellow bumblebee

The Great yellow bumblebee is a late emerging bumblebee. Queens are usually seen from mid-June. Queens will feed on nectar and then begin to search for a suitable nest site.

Great yellow queens will use old mouse nests, rabbit burrows and other holes under grass tussocks as nest sites. It is estimated that nest density is no more than one or two nests for every square kilometre of suitable habitat.

Great yellow queens produce small colonies compared to other bumblebees with 20-50 workers. Workers, seen from mid-July onwards, collect nectar and pollen to support the nest. The queen will switch from producing workers to rearing males and daughter queens in late July. Males emerge from the nest in early August and daughter queens are seen from mid-August.

After mating, daughter queens find suitable hibernation sites in deep plant litter or under grass tussocks in soil or sand dunes. They will not emerge again until June the following year.

During late August and September the old queen, workers and male Great yellow bumblebees will die.



Top: Grass tussocks make good nest sites.

Bottom: Sand dunes are believed to be good hibernation sites for Great yellow bumblebees.

Managing for Great yellow bumblebee



Above: Traditionally managed machair provides Great yellow bumblebees with a continuous supply of pollen and nectar.

Great yellow bumblebees have three main requirements. They need:

- a suitable nest site
- a continuous supply of flowers from May to September, especially red clover, vetches and knapweed
- a suitable place for queens to hibernate.

If you would like detailed advice about bumblebee-friendly management options for your land please contact your local Bumblebee Conservation Trust Conservation Officer .

Get in touch

Phone: 02380 642 060

Email: advice@bumblebeeconservation.org

Website: bumblebeeconservation.org

With thanks to:

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