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Issue 8

Mercia Marinas Bee group Newsletter

WOW!

The cottage garden is looking fantastic and the bees and ladybirds are having a great time. Some of the plants have had quite a load of aphids but this is good for the Ladybirds. We shall have to keep our eyes open for any ladybird larva. Strange little things but also voracious eaters of aphids. This is the larva of a seven-spot ladybird but each breed differs slightly.



Still seeing some bumblebee Queens about as well. People have also been reporting large bumblebees with just one or two yellow bands and the abdomen all black. These are quite possible cuckoo Bees. They vary enormously in coloration. What we are seeing will most likely be Field Cuckoo Bee (*Bombus campestris*) which preys on the Common Carder Bumblebee nests.



Male

The males may often be completely black.



Female

SO HOW DO CUCKOO BUMBLEBEES TAKE OVER A HOSTS NEST?

Cuckoo females typically emerge from hibernation a few (perhaps around 6) weeks after the target host species. Some cuckoos target only one specific species of bumblebee, whilst others may select from two or three target hosts. It must firstly locate a ready prepared nest at an appropriate stage of development.

Of course, bumblebee workers are very important for increasing the size of a colony and rearing the brood. For this reason, the female cuckoo must choose her target

host carefully. There must be a colony already established of at least a few workers to help the cuckoo rear her offspring. On the other hand, if there are too many workers in the nest, she may be attacked and easily defeated. A nest with 2 broods already reared, may have enough workers to overpower the cuckoo, and prevent her establishing herself in the nest.

Once the cuckoo has found a suitable nest, she will typically lurk around it for some time, in order to 'pick up the scent' of the host. This will help her to usurp the resident queen if necessary, and gain acceptance of the workers.

Once the cuckoo enters the nest, there are a variety of scenarios that may occur, but a common one is that the original host queen is killed.

The cuckoo will then set about laying her own eggs in the nest for the workers of the original queen to tend to and feed. As stated, however, timing is critical. If the cuckoo has entered a nest that is well developed, and there are many workers, they may attack the parasite, and kill her. On the other hand, if there are too few workers to support her, then she will not be able to rear many offspring. Research has also shown that the cuckoo is not always successful at establishing herself in the host nest. She may be attacked and killed by the target host queen.

Also, keep your eyes open for neat oval shapes which have been cut from a leaf, especially rose leaves. These will be the Leaf-cutter bee. We did put some cocoons of these fascinating little bees in one of the release chambers in the cottage garden. If you see one at work just watch for a while she will fly off carrying the leaf between her legs and take it back to her nest. If it is not the right size she will throw it out and get another piece. Leaf-cutters will use the nest boxes we have put up just like the mason bees and their cocoons will be removed early in the new year. Cleaned and stored ready for release next spring. Please report any bees seen with photo if possible. Happy bee hunting.