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Issue 2

# Mercia Marinas Bee group Newsletter

## Solitary bees



Male red mason bee



Female red mason bee

Red mason bees are one of our most important pollinators. They are essential in pollinating, among other plants, fruit trees, in fact 6 mason bees can pollinate a whole apple tree whereas it would take 350 honey bees to do the same job. These fascinating bees feed on many native wild and cottage garden flowers. Having a medium length tongue gives them the ability to feed and pollinate numerous plants. So, what can we do to encourage and help more of these essential bees.

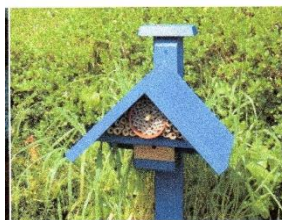
These solitary bees, as well as others, nest in canes and tubes. We commented last month about mites getting into bee nests. Since then we have been on a workshop to discover more. The bee nesters made from canes and other tubes get attacked by mites and parasitic flies. An infestation of mites will reduce the bee's ability to fly so they cannot then gather enough nectar and pollen so pollination is reduced and subsequently so is the number of bees.

Therefore, we should be looking at ways to reduce this threat. So, we learned how to remove the bee cocoons, clean them and store them. This does them no harm at all. Then in the spring they are put into a release chamber which is attached to the clean bee nesters.



Before cleaning (left) and after cleaning on the right. Cleaned cocoons

This means that we need to make new nesters with release chambers and tubes which can be easily replaced each year after cocoon removal. Ron Rock of the Bumblebee Conservation Trust makes these and has kindly made a DIY kit for us to use as a template. Robert has



Ready for the new season

agreed to pay for the materials including the special tubes and liners. Nigel and Neil are prepared to get busy and make some of these ready for the new season. How do we know if we have any of these red mason bees anyway? The best news of all is, we have no need to worry as Ron is going to let us have 20 cocoons for each nester we can get in place by next March.

Then watch the fun, as the males hatch first and will keep going in and out of the release chamber waiting for the females. We have seen a video of this and it is so funny they are just crazy. Mason bees are extremely placid and their life span is very short, all over by July.

These nesters will also be ideal for leafcutter bees, which we know we have here. So, lots of good work we can continue to do, get involved I and educate others.

There has also been a visit from Ken Orpe looking into our butterfly habitats. He commented that we have 'the potential to become an important site in South Derbyshire for bees and butterflies because of our efforts to date'. He will be giving a talk on March 17th 2017 and we will be setting up butterfly transects.

As well as bee transects it seems there will be a lot of walking and recording to be done next summer. Bearing that in mind we thought it might be a good idea to try and encourage a separate group to take on butterflies. Of course, there is no reason why we cannot also be involved in that as well

Happy New Wildlife Year everyone.