

RED MASON BEE

Osmia rufa

Special nesters with release chambers are located around the Marina.



Male

Female

DESCRIPTION – The females have a black-haired head, brown-haired thorax and orange-haired abdomen. She measures 8-10mm long. The face has a pair of incurved ‘horns’.

The males are smaller, 6-8mm, slimmer and have longer antennae and whitish haired faces. When fresh the abdominal hairs can be a very bright orange. As with many other types of bees colours may sometimes vary. They fade in the sun and by the end of the season much of the fur may be lost.

FLIGHT SEASON - Red mason bees are only active from April to July. Males appear a couple of weeks before females and the females persist long after the males have died. No red mason bee lives to see its own offspring.

HABITAT – They inhabit many habitats but particularly attracted to gardens, churchyards and urban greenspace.

PLANTS VISITED – Many species visited including garden flowers, spring flowering shrubs but are mostly attracted to fruit trees such as apples & pears.

NESTING HABITS – Nesting occurs in many pre-existing holes and cavities. Holes in soft mortar, vertical earth spaces, old beetle holes in dead wood even empty snail shells. They are one of the first to exploit bee hotels/nesters. Nests are constructed from wet mud from puddles and carried back to the nest site in the mandibles. The facial ‘horns’ are then used to manipulate the mud into the cells. An egg will be laid in each cell which will then be sealed with mud. Pollen and nectar is taken into the nests to feed the larvae which hatch after about a week. They then spin a cocoon before turning into an adult bee. They will remain in the cocoon until the following spring.

OTHER FACTS - They are docile little bees, not given to stinging and are safe around children and pets. Like all bees only the female carries a sting and it is said that the only way she will sting you is if you catch her and roll her between your fingers.

Like many of our bees they are badly affected by habitat loss and pesticides. They are excellent pollinators of fruit trees and soft fruits. So important are they that they may be reared commercially to pollinate fruit orchards in the UK.