Mercia Marinas Bee group Newsletter

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Issue 7

WHAT YOU MIGHT SEE NOW

We are now getting into the time for many other species of bee to make an appearance. White-tailed, Red-tailed & Common Carder bumblebee queens are all out and about. Unless you can get a close look White & Buff tailed can look very similar. The White-tailed (Bombus lucorum) is a little smaller and whole of the bottom of her abdomen is white. On the Buff tailed there is a small band of beige above the white.

Much easier to identify is Red-tailed (Bombus lapadarius), as the name suggests the tail is a striking red but the rest of the queen is all black. She is unmistakable.

The Common carder (Bombus pascuorum) has rather small very fluffy queens. They are our only common bumblebee which has a dense tawny or ginger coat on the thorax. Out now, and will be one of our last bees to disappear in the autumn, often still in flight in November.

OTHER BEES

Many solitary bees are now around. Much smaller than the bumblebees and some are harder to tell apart.

Our Red-masons have been very active over the last few weeks, those of you who have seen them will be well aware of how small they are. The males hatched first but now many of the females are busy collecting pollen. You can tell which are female by the 'pollen baskets' on their legs. Males do not collect pollen.

The colour of the pollen baskets will vary from very pale, almost white to, blue, red, orange even black, depending on what flowers the bees have been collecting from. i.e. poppy pollen is black and phacelia is a lovely blue colour.

Some of the Hover flies actually mimic bees. This a good defence for them from predators. If you see a 'bee' distinctly hovering by flowers the chances are it is not a bee at all. The appearance is very deceptive only the behavior gives the clues.

BEE I.D. & ECOLOGY

Not easy, as I am sure Nigel Hunt will verify as he has been on a bumblebee identification workshop at Markeaton Park. A very informative day, as well as looking at identification we also leant a lot about the ecology of bees and why so many are disappearing from our countryside and gardens.

Often the use of chemicals is blamed on the decline in bumblebee species, however this decline began before the introduction of neonicotnoids. Changes in agriculture have reduced the number of flowers available, cereal crops do not flower, fertilizing fields produces too much grass growth, swamping out wildflowers. Any that do survive are cut for silage before they can seed.

The only method to get an early warning of bee decline is to carry out regular bee walks. We started these walks last month and reported to the Bumblebee Conservation Trust so here at the Marina we are doing our bit.

If you would like to come on a bee walk please let us know. It does not take long as we have six different routes varying in length from 550mtrs to 1100mtrs so it can suit all ages. LETS ALL GET SPOTTING.