



AGRII WILDLIFE INFORMATION SHEET No.3

Creating homes for bees

Farmers are increasingly being asked to provide for pollinators. Fact sheet No.2 provides a general introduction to bees whereas this sheet provides information on creating homes for bees. In some cases homes may be a limiting factor when trying to increase bee numbers.

INTRODUCTION

The creation of flower-rich habitats receives considerable publicity but homes for bees are seldom mentioned. Creating homes next to flowers or where pollination is needed can greatly improve both the survival of bees and effectiveness of flower areas.

Honeybees

Honeybees live in man-made structures called hives.

Some honeybees 'go wild' and can live in cavities in trees or buildings.

Honeybees are farmed for their honey (the bee's winter food) so hives make honeybee transport and honey collection much easier.



Bumblebees

Bumblebees divide into two types: 'below ground' nesters, and 'above ground' nesters or 'carder bees'.

The former includes the Buff-tailed Bumblebee *Bombus terrestris*, which uses old vole nests which are commonly found in tussocky grass.

The latter includes the declining Brown-banded Carder Bee *Bombus humilis* and Red-shanked Carder Bee *Bombus ruderarius*, which nest on the surface of short, open established grassland where there is a layer of moss and dead plant material, which they use as insulation for their nests.

However, it is vital that the sun's warmth can reach the ground, so thick tussocky grass is not suitable for these surface nesters.

Instead, perennial flower margins which are cut annually and the cuttings taken away, or grazed occasionally, provide suitable habitat.

Bumblebee boxes are seldom used, suggesting natural habitats are more suitable.



A Buff-tailed bumblebee *B. terrestris* leaving its underground old vole's nest



A tussocky grass strip which makes an ideal habitat for many species, especially small mammals. Its location has reduced the inconvenience of the telegraph poles.





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Solitary bees

Solitary bees can be split into cavity nesters and mining bees.

Cavity nesters

Cavity nesters use existing cavities in mature hedges, old gate and fence posts, brick and stone walls.

These need to be in sunny positions.

Specially made boxes filled with cut bamboo canes are well used but a greater variety of tube sizes (2-12mm) will attract a wider range of cavity bees.



Mason bees, *Osmia* spp – use mud in construction.



Megachilidae – use leaves in construction.

Mining bees

Field studies have shown that when suitable nesting areas (i.e. bare ground) for solitary mining bees are created, they are very readily taken up.

This suggests that they may be a limiting factor when trying to increase bee numbers and that these bees are likely to be the ones that benefit most from providing nest sites.



WHAT TO DO

Maintain areas of bare ground such as field corners or close to flower margins. These must be in full sun.



WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Look for small 'volcanoes' of soil with a hole in the middle.

Not to be confused with ant (right) or worm casts (below right).

REMEMBER

Adults can take 18 months to emerge so leave these patches in place for a few years if possible.



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For more information on this environmental fact sheet, please speak to your Agrii agronomist or contact Marek Nowakowski on 07885 252383.

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