

Bumblebee notes for November

It is true that the Autumn is coming to an end but you will probably notice that there are still annual and perennial flowers in bloom as well as several types of shrub. A closer look is likely to be rewarded by the sight of a queen bumblebee busily gathering nectar and honey to help her to last through the Winter. The commonest one is the carder bee wearing a splendid thoracic cloak of bright ginger and a paler brown striped abdomen.

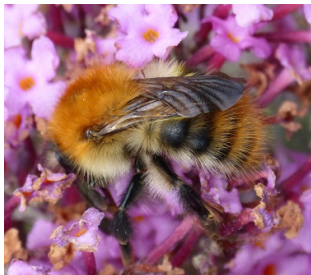
Of course there are very few plants in bloom now compared with the earlier part of the year but, if you visit a local Garden Centre you will soon spot which varieties are of interest to the bees. Caryopteris is an excellent example of a shrub that is covered with flower clusters with an attractive pale blue colour that the bumble queens really look for.

Last week we were walking across the John Lewis Partnership golf course and suddenly came upon one of several flower beds crammed with pollinator-friendly annuals. Amongst the orange calendula there were red cosmos and blue cornflower that were still in bloom. Carder bees and a few of their white-tailed cousins were foraging .

I know that there is a growing awareness of the plight of bumblebees throughout the Cookhams and we are all learning what we can do to help. The message about growing a range of flowers to provide nectar and pollen for every month has got through and so has the idea of avoiding insecticides (especially neonicotinoids). While stuck in doors there is a good opportunity to learn more about bumblebees. We can all become experts.

The internet is a wonderful tool for tracking down information but there is plenty to enjoy that is provided by charities such as Friends of the Earth, Wildaboutgardens, the RHS, and of course the Bumblebee Conservation Trust (which I may have mentioned before). At this time of year it is also worth bearing in mind that a membership pack from a wildlife organisation will make a refreshing change to someone's Christmas present collection. More simply, a well-produced and readable book like "Bumblebees, an introduction" produced by the BCT could provide the first step. It may create a new hobby for them and should certainly leave you feeling mighty virtuous.

Dr Bumbledore



The common carder bumblebee (*Bombus pascuorum*)