Published on *Royal Entomological Society* (http://www.royensoc.co.uk)



# Bumblebees (Hymenoptera)

Bumblebees are hairy, rotund insects, familiar to almost everyone. They are excellent pollinators and play an important role in the garden. In the spring the queen will look for a suitable home, such as an old mouse nest, and may fight a rival queen bee to the death for occupancy. Bumblebees have a rigid social structure, which is dominated by the queen. She will lay eggs to produce female workers to serve her, controlling them through aggression and producing chemical messengers (pheromones) that inhibit their sexual development. Eventually she loses control and both sexes are produced. There are 25 species of bumblebee in the UK. Unfortunately bumblebees are in decline in Europe, probably due to the intensification of farming. Three species have gone extinct in the UK in the past 30 years alone. Encourage them into your garden by planting wild plants, such as honeysuckle, comfrey, knapweed, red clover and flowering currant. These together flower over the bumblebee flying period from March to October.
bee
**Buff-tailed bumblebee** Bombus terrestris

## Fact File

The length of a bumblebee's tongue will determine which flower species it can feed on.

Long-tongued bumblebees are close to extinction in the UK.

Bumblebees leave chemical post-it notes on flowers they have just visited to tell others that they have taken all the nectar.

The cutting of hay meadows during May - August can be disasterous for bumblebees - it destroys nectar-producing flowers and the surface nests of some species.

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**Source URL:** http://www.royensoc.co.uk/insect_info/what/bumblebees.htm