

Spirit of Sutterby.
Flight of the bumblebee...:
Spring research project.

We have had an ongoing interest in bumblebees since the project began. This Spring we are collaborating with Dr David Sheppard, County Recorder for bees, wasps etc for the Lincs Naturalists Union, to run a small research project which involves surveying and recording four bumblebees, which emerge early in the year.

Over the next few weeks the Queens of the Buff-tailed bumblebee (*Bombus terrestris*), the White-tailed bumblebee (*Bombus lucorum*) and the appropriately named Early Bumblebee (*Bombus pratorum*) will be emerging from hibernation, shortly followed by the Red-tailed Bumblebee (*Bombus lapidarius*).

The Queens will begin by foraging for food to replenish their bodies ready for subsequent nest building and brood raising. They will be buzzing around - attracted to pussy willow, early flowering shrubs such as mahonia and Winter flowering honeysuckle (*Lonicera fragrantissima*) and the early flowers of crocuses, primroses, violets etc. (They are unlikely to be attracted to daffodils.)

They start by stocking up on nectar and move on to protein-rich pollen from catkins and other male flowers, which they need to develop their eggs. They already have a supply of sperm saved from a brief mating with a male (now dead...) last year.

The aim of this piece of research is to monitor and record the bumblebees in our gardens and beyond. We have drawn up a simple recording form and identification sheet. Any and every record is of import, whether you live in Lincolnshire or indeed beyond.

The records will be collated and sent to David and will help to provide a snapshot of bumblebee Queen numbers and distribution. We simply need your name, a postcode and a record of which Queen bumblebee you have seen. If you can provide added information relating to which food plants they are using that would be a bonus.

An extra piece of information which would be of particular interest to David is whether the bumblebee is carrying any pollen on its back legs. If you can spot this it would be extremely useful as it indicates that the Queen has started to build her underground nest. As you may be aware, the Queen will disappear underground by May and will not re-emerge. Amazing. We will, of course, see the workers. Extra brownie points will be awarded if you ever manage to spot and record where the underground nest actually is! The queens don't dig but will use pre-made tunnels such as old mouse nests, openings in compost heaps and cavities beneath sheds are all possible locations. Please just add this nest information to the 'Comments' box.

Please return the forms to spiritofsutterby@gmail.com
or by post to Spirit of Sutterby, Fen View, Fen Lane, East Keal, Lincs PE23 4AY
Any queries, please get in touch by email or phone 01790 754079

Thank you for your help.

Bumblebee id photos.

Buff-tailed bumblebee (*Bombus terrestris*) Queen



White-tailed bumblebee (*Bombus lucorum*) Queen.



Early bumblebee (*Bombus pratorum*) Queen.



Red-tailed bumblebee (*Bombus lapidarius*) Queen



