

Tayside Biodiversity Partnership



BIODIVERSITY THE VARIETY OF LIFE

Buzzy Gardens - Butterflies and Bees

The sight of a butterfly flitting from flower to flower always cheers us up. Most people are fascinated by bumblebees: how do those tiny wings propel such a large insect around? Honey Bees – there's frightening news about their demise. Wasps? Not many champions for them... Hoverflies? Well, they hover. We have such a diverse reaction to the many different types of insects. Yet as Edward O Wilson said – *"if people were to disappear, the world would regenerate back to the rich state that existed ten thousand years ago. If insects were to vanish, the environment would collapse into chaos"*.

Maybe we need to start respecting our garden insects a bit more! For instance, of the 25 species of bumblebee in Britain, there are 6 common species in Scotland but even these "common species" are in trouble. In Tayside you can download information, or take part in an online survey via http://www.taysidebiodiversity.co.uk/Project_Bumblebee.html. Or a survey form can be sent to you – just telephone 01382 433042/e-mail Tayside.biodiversity@ukf.net. If you live outwith Tayside, join in the Bumble Bee Conservation Trust BeeWatch Survey – there's an excellent website - <http://www.bumblebeeconservation.org.uk/>. The Trust's book '*Gardening for Bumblebees*' will help turn your garden into a haven for bumblebees - check the website on how to order (£3, including p&p).

Bee species are the single most important insect pollinator – 80% of the food we eat comes from crops pollinated by them. They are exclusively vegetarian, feeding on nectar and pollen. They are very sensitive to pesticides, particularly insecticides, which taint the nectar in flowers and poisons both the bees and their young – another reason to reduce or eliminate chemicals from the garden.

What else can we do? Encourage bumblebees by growing comfrey, borage, marjoram, mint and lavender. They love delphiniums, purple loosestrife, St John's Wort and Viper's bugloss too. And don't forget the different types of heathers for late summer/early autumn. Invest in a bumblebee box to hide in the garden, or simply make a football-sized hollow in the ground and cover with a paving slab (leaving a few gaps around the edges): this will provide a suitable nest site.

Beyond our gardens, the loss of food plants and over-wintering places is affecting our populations of butterflies, although no one knows why there's been a sudden decline in our once-common Small Tortoiseshell butterfly. Both moths and butterflies prefer scented flowers with long, tubular throats so Gillyflowers, ice plants, phlox, verbena and tobacco plants are all perfect. To attract moths think "night-scented flowers"; this will help the local bat population too! You can report Tortoiseshell butterfly sightings to http://www.butterfly-conservation.org/form/3196/Scottish_Small_Tortoiseshell_survey.html.

And whilst a lot of people dislike wasps, they're highly beneficial - unlike butterflies and bees, wasps in their larval stage are carnivorous and eat their way through tens of thousands of garden pests each season. Oh yes, and hover flies – more friends in our garden. Many Hoverfly larvae eat aphids, but the adults need nectar and pollen. They love Yarrow, Coriander, Fennel and Lobelia – all common in our gardens.

500 words – for <http://www.trellisscotland.org.uk/newsletters>

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