

Early Learning Sheet 23 Insect Fact Sheet

Bumblebees

Bumblebees are one of our most familiar insects. Known to everyone from an early age, there seems to be a public fondness for them, something their close relatives wasps, have

never enjoyed. Perhaps its because bumblebees are nectar feeders, although they will take salts during hot weather. Wasps on the other hand, have a much more varied diet which often brings them into contact with humans, more frequently than bumblebees.



Bumblebees live in relatively small colonies, formed by the queen in Spring, after she has spent the winter months in hibernation. Nests are often in

mouse holes, old bird nests or bird boxes, or in grass tussocks. The brood cells are not systematically arranged like those of honey bees and wasps, but are clumped together in a more disorganised manner.

Bumblebees are important pollinators of flowers, but have declined in recent years. Part of the reason for their decline in numbers, is thought due to changes in farming practices, the use of pesticides and a general tidying up of the countryside.

But bumblebees are not always black with yellow bands. The Common Carder Bee is a brown species, with a largely black abdomen, but a new species of brown bumblebee has recently colonised the UK. Sometimes known as the Tree-nesting Bumblebee, this brown, black and white species, is fast becoming one of our commonest bumblebees. It appeared here in 2001 and continues to spread north.

So look after bumblebees. You can help by planting nectar rich flowers, or provide them with special bumblebee nest boxes.

