Bumblebees

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With some slides donated from Úna Fitzpatrick and the Bumblebee Conservation Trust
What is a bumblebee?

- Furry
- Fat, round, large
- Buzzing
- Stripes are on hair, not skeleton underneath
- Pollen baskets (females only)
Queen emerges in early spring

Forage and find a nest

Prepares a pollen loaf and a nectar pot and starts laying eggs fertilised with sperm stored from previous year

Queen remains in the nest laying eggs

Workers emerge and take over nest duties

New queens and males leave the nest and mate

In mid-late summer the queen lays unfertilised eggs which will become males. She also allows some new queens to develop

New queen goes into hibernation. Males and the old nest die off in the autumn/winter

LIFE CYCLE: BUMBLEBEES
NESTING: BUMBLEBEES

Noel Clohessy

© Joe Curtis
Banding

— Position

— Strength
Tail colour

- White,
- Red or orange
- Yellow
- Buff or ginger
Legs

— Only female social bumblebees will be carrying pollen loads
The big six queens: common and widespread bumblebees

White-tailed bumblebee
Buff-tailed bumblebee
Garden bumblebee
Early bumblebee
Red-tailed bumblebee
Common carder bee
DIFFERENT TYPES OF BUMBLEBEES
White-tailed bumblebee
Garden bumblebee
Buff-tailed bumblebee
Common carder bee
Red-tailed bumblebee
Early bumblebee
FUSSY EATERS

Different species of bumblebee have different lengths of tongue which means they feed from different shaped flowers.

Paul Corcoran

Short tongued bumblebee robbing nectar!
WHY ARE BEES DECLINING?

1. HABITAT LOSS

2. GENERAL DECLINE IN WILDFLOWERS
PROVIDE HOMES FOR BUMBLEBEES

Hedgerows or areas with long grass
 PROVIDE FOOD FOR BEES

✓ Plant a range of native species to provide flowers for bees throughout the season from March-September.

✓ Leave an area of your lawn uncut during summer to allow Clovers and Bird’s-foot Trefoil to flower.
HELP BEES IN SPRING

The bumblebee queen needs to keep her eggs at 30°C for ~4 days until they hatch.

In the early days of the nest it is estimated that a *Bombus terrestris* queen may have to visit as many as 6000 flowers/day to get enough nectar to maintain the heat needed to brood her eggs.

During every foraging trip the brood will cool down, so the trips should be short.

This is why it is vital that the nest is located close to rewarding flowers.
Mismatch between flowering dates of plants and emergence dates of pollinators. In the UK blackcurrant and its pollinators have diverged by 28 days since the 1970’s.

The tree bumblebee (Bombus hypnorum) arrived in Britain in 2001 and is spreading rapidly. Hasn’t been spotted in Ireland yet.