Bees

Bees are at risk

- Globally, 41% of insect species face extinction**.**
- 23 bee and flower-visiting wasp species have gone extinct in the UK since 1850.
- Geographic ranges of 13 out of 23 bumblebee species have more than halved between pre-1960 and 2012, with the short-haired bumblebee and Cullum's bumblebee going extinct.
- Declines are linked to loss of habitats and increased use of pesticides.
- Habitats are being destroyed by agricultural practices to meet food demand, increasing urban development and climate change.
- 97% of lowland wildflower meadows were lost in England and Wales between the 1930s and 1980s, as well as thousands of miles of hedgerows and field margins.
- Pesticides and herbicides are routinely used by farmers, growers and gardeners.

Bees are important

- 85-95% of the UK's insect-pollinated crops relying on wild pollinators including solitary bees and bumblebees.
- Honeybees are mostly kept in managed hives and are likely responsible for pollinating between 5-15% of our insect-pollinated crops.
- Bumblebees help to pollinator wildflowers which are an important food source for many species.
- If insect declines are not halted, terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems will collapse, with profound consequences for human wellbeing.

*Source: Insect declines and why they matter, by Prof. Dave Goulson

How Wildlife Trusts help

- Managing nature reserves where bee habitats are safe from destruction.
- Sharing research into declines and what we can do.
- Calling for a Nature Recovery Network including bee-friendly habitats.
- Calling for Action for Insects.
- Promoting bee-friendly gardening.
- Working with landowners and farmers to encourage wildlife-friendly practices.

How people can help

- Reduce the use of pesticides in the garden
- Create insect friendly habitats (this will also help encourage natural predators such as ladybirds and hoverflies that eat ‘pests’ such as aphids) such as log/stick piles, areas of long grass, and leaving borders uncut until spring.
- Choose pollen and nectar-rich ‘single’ flowers that flower in succession through the year and native species that help in other ways too, for example the leaves of dog rose (Rosa canina) are used by Leafcutter bees to make nests.
- Grow two or more of the same plant together so that bees can save energy when gathering pollen and nectar.
- Grow from seed, cuttings or plugs that are insecticide/pesticide free, or check from the nursery or supplier that more mature plants have been grown without chemicals that will harm bees.
- Hang up bee ‘homes’ for some species of solitary bees to lay their eggs. These need to have the right design and looked after in the right way – check online for advice, make your own or buy from credible suppliers.
- Use consumer power – try a local organic veg box scheme where veg may not look ‘perfect’ but will have been grown without pesticides and alongside bee-friendly plants. Review how much and what you eat, for example if shopping at a supermarket can you buy less and choose organically-grown options?
- Pledge to take Action for Insects.
- Learn more by reading Prof Dave Goulson’s South West Wildlife Trusts-commissioned report ‘Insect declines and why they matter’.

Fast facts

1. As well as Bumblebees and Honey bees (that live socially) there are over 240 species of wild bees in the UK that are called 'solitary bees' because they make individual nest cells for their larvae.
2. Solitary bees are harmless and not aggressive. They rarely if ever sting unless trodden on or squashed between your fingers.
3. Most solitary bees nest in small tunnels or holes in the ground or in sandy banks, piles of sand, or crumbling mortar or sparse starved lawns. You can leave areas of bare soil or gravel in your garden for these.
4. Species commonly seen in gardens, such as Red Mason and Leafcutter Bees, nest in tubes or tunnels.

Sources and resources

- Insect Declines and Why They Matter by Prof. Dave Goulson (2019)
- Your Wild Bee Action Pack from Wild About Gardens
- State of Nature 2019 report
- www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-and-wild-places/saving-species/save-bees-and-pollinators