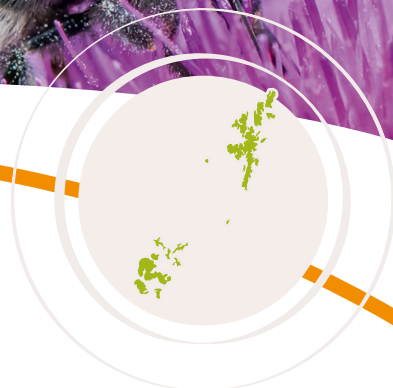


SPECIES
on the **EDGE**

A guide to the
Bumblebees of
Orkney and Shetland



Bumblebee
Conservation
Trust

Introduction

The Bumblebee Conservation Trust is a membership charity, founded in 2006, to address serious concerns about the future of our wild bumblebees. The Trust aims to help bumblebees across the UK by raising public and political awareness, promoting bumblebee friendly land management, bumblebee-friendly gardening and working with communities to help bumblebees thrive.

Why have bumblebees declined?

We have lost over 97% of our flower-rich meadows over the past century, and bumblebees need flowers to survive. Two bumblebees have become extinct nationally, and many others, such as the Great Yellow bumblebee, are of great conservation concern.

The bumblebees...

Pale-tailed bumblebees

1. White-tailed bumblebee (*Bombus lucorum* agg.)



Found almost everywhere, and one of the first to emerge from hibernation in the spring. Queens and workers look almost identical. Males have a yellow face and often more yellow bands. The amount of extra yellow can vary between hardly any, to almost completely yellow, apart from the white tail.

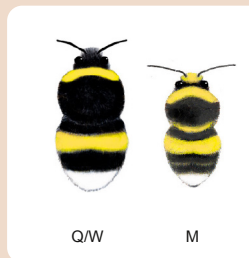


Photo: Nick Owens

White-tailed bumblebees are genetically three different species which are indistinguishable in the field.

Key

Q Queen W Worker M Male F Female



Orkney



Shetland

2. Buff-tailed bumblebee (*Bombus terrestris*)



First discovered on the islands in the 2010s, the Buff-tailed bumblebee is now a widespread species. The queens are first to appear in the spring and are easily recognised by their buff or buffy-white 'tails'. Males and workers are very similar to the White-tailed bumblebee and are often difficult to tell apart.



Photo: Helen Dickinson

3. Garden bumblebee (*Bombus hortorum*)



The Garden bumblebee has a long 'horse-like' face and a very long tongue, often feeding on long flowers such as foxgloves and honeysuckle. The queens are very large, but the workers and males vary greatly in size.

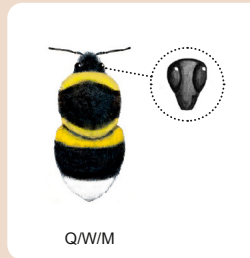


Photo: Pieter Hairingsma

4. Heath bumblebee (*Bombus jonellus*)



In Orkney, the Heath bumblebee shares the same banding pattern as the Garden bumblebee and can be told apart by their round face shape.

Shetland has a different colour form, which sometimes occurs in Orkney as well, and is easier to distinguish. The tail is buff/peach (or even yellow-reddish) rather than white. It also has a short tongue and prefers to feed on flowers such as heather.

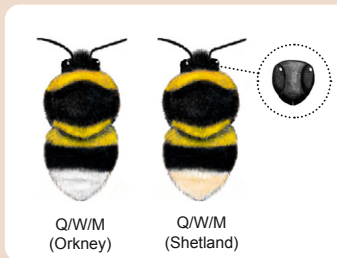


Photo: Nick Owens



5. Gypsy cuckoo bumblebee (*Bombus bohemicus*)



This is the only cuckoo bee species found in the islands. They are a nest parasite and not a true social species. They don't have a queen or worker caste as they invade the nests of white-tailed bumblebees, take over the nest and its workers, which then look after the cuckoo's eggs rather than their own.

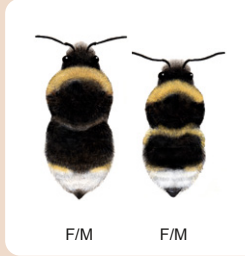


Photo: Nick Owens

Red-tailed bumblebees

6. Early bumblebee (*Bombus pratorum*)



Small with a short tongue and a very active flight behaviour. The middle band in the workers is often faded and the red 'tail' is very short and tricky to spot.

Have you spotted the Early bumblebee in Orkney?
Let us know.

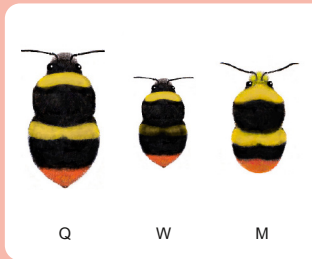


Photo: Gerald Schultz



Yellow-tailed bumblebees

7. Common carder bumblebee (*Bombus pascuorum*)

The Common carder bumblebee is widespread and common across most of the UK. The Common carder bumblebee has varying amounts of black hair on the thorax and abdomen.



8. Moss carder bumblebee (*Bombus muscorum*)

The Moss carder bumblebee is a priority species in the UK due to marked population declines.

In Orkney, it is more difficult to identify as it looks very similar to the Common carder bumblebee. However, there are no black hairs on the body at all.

The subspecies local to Shetland is particularly vibrant in colour and is known as 'Shetland bumblebee'.



Top tip

You can tell whether a bumblebee is male or female by looking at its legs.

If you see a shiny, flattish looking segment on the back legs (called a pollen basket) or a big clump of pollen on this area, then it is a **female** bumblebee, because **male** bumblebees do not collect pollen.

9. Great Yellow bumblebee (*Bombus distinguendus*)



Distinctive mustard yellow bumblebee with a black band between the wings.

Once widespread over the UK, the Great Yellow bumblebee is found only in far north and west Scottish mainland and islands.

Orkney supports one of the last remaining populations of this rare bumblebee. It is strongly associated with habitats rich in kidney vetch, red clover and knapweed.

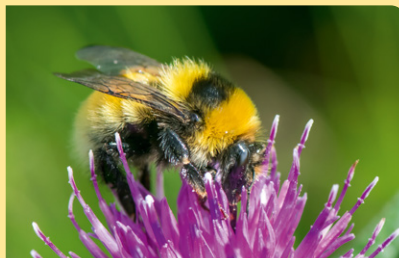


Photo: Pieter Haringssma

How you can be involved

Bumblebees are under-recorded on the islands, and we need your help so that we have the information we need to target our conservation efforts better.

You can help by

- joining one of our free identification courses.
- signing up to our BeeWalk citizen science programme as a survey volunteer.
- become a member and be sure your contribution is going to where the funding is most needed. Members receive a welcome pack and our *Buzzword* magazine three times per year, providing fascinating facts about bumblebees and updates on our projects.
- planting native bumblebee-friendly wildflower flowers. Try to source seeds from the island group where you live.



Photo: Helen Cromarty, Species on the Edge

You can find out more about the Species on the Edge programme at speciestheedge.co.uk

bumblebeeconservation.org

Follow us on    

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