

Do you have Honey Bees or Bumble Bees?



Honey Bee Collecting Nectar



Bumble Bee collecting pollen.

Have a look at the above pictures to identify whether they are Honey Bees or Bumble Bees.

If they are furry like the 2nd picture, the good news is they are bumble bees, and they only take up residence for a short period. It starts with the queen bee finding a suitable nesting site and as soon as you see bees in any number these are the workers who will forage for nectar & pollen. You will not see many in your garden because they will have consumed all the forage very quickly and move on to other gardens. This will continue until August/September and then they will move on.

Bumble bees are not aggressive, but they will defend their young like any mother will, so left undisturbed they will not cause you a problem. However, if you want to prevent a re-occurrence next year simply block up the entrance when they have departed.

Bumble bees are endangered and it is illegal to kill them. Anyone found to have poisoned them risks prosecution & the maximum fine in the Magistrates Court is £25k, unlimited in Crown Court, average fine imposed at present is £1.5k. Bee keepers will charge to remove these nests, at a cost of £20 to £45, depending on the work involved. Alternatively you can purchase a proper bumble bee home for £25.

Additional information on Bumble Bees:

Bumble bee queens, (*Bombus* sp) live just about twelve months, they emerge as virgin queens from nests underground and above ground from the end of July to the middle of August, which may now be earlier due to climate change. They build up body fat ready for five months of hibernation. The queens vary a little in size dependant on breed and the quantity of larval food consumed. The largest are equivalent to the size of your thumb from it's tip to the first joint & colours vary from all black, black with white or orange abdominal tip to brilliant rusty or yellow bands and multi coloured dull rusty to primrose yellow bands.

Life Cycle

The queens emerge in Spring from hibernation, they first search out nectar bearing flowers from which they feed on nectar & pollen, at the same time pollinating those flowers causing seed to be set. When nice and plump and feeling the time is right they search out a suitable nest site, a disused mouse nest underground, thick grass tufts over ground and warm roofs above ground. Commonly they are to be found in compost heaps which provide moist warm environment suitable to their needs.

The queen builds a saucepan like cell of wax and lays several eggs. She then feeds and cares for the larvae. and as these worker bees emerge they take over nursing and feeding, foraging for pollen and nectar amongst the flowers in yours and local gardens.

Ideal Social Insect to Study.

Bumble bees are no threat whatsoever, if you have young children then they are an ideal social insect to watch and learn about. Peg out four sticks around the nest area to indicate the nest position, say two foot by two foot or for the children 60cm by 60cm, now look through your natural history books with the children to identify which specie you have or 'Google' Bumble Bees to find out a wealth of information. See what colour pollen the bees carry on their legs, ask the children if they can see the same colour pollen on the flowers in your garden. Use a clock or stop watch so the children can count how many bees leave the nest in a minute, how many return in a minute repeat this three times during the day, aggregate the sums and divide up to find the average. Bumble bees leave the nest for thirty to sixty minutes; see if you can calculate how many bees might be in the nest. Bumble bees never swarm like honeybees and rarely reach more than seventy bees in a colony.

Removal.

If you are allergic to stings or have young children and feel you need to remove them [remember they die out in August/September] it is a simple matter to collect up the nest by a honeybee keeper, providing it can be accessed.

The nest must be carefully exposed all round until it is above it's surroundings, a small shovel, spade or adequately thin strong tool is needed to slide below the nest lifting it as a whole. Lay a cardboard box on its side with flaps open ready to receive the nest, slide the nest carefully into the box. Stand the box where the nest was until dark, when all the flying bees have returned. Close it up with all the bees inside, tape the box shut, punch small ventilation holes through the box. Take the box over two miles away and lodge in a sheltered place under a hedge, shed or some sort of protective cover.