

JUNE WORKSHOP ON BUMBLEBEE IDENTIFICATION

The usual monthly outing was replaced in June by a workshop on the biology and identification of bumblebees conducted by Dr. Úna Fitzpatrick senior ecologist at the national Biodiversity Data Centre Waterford. The workshop took place on the 8th June 2013 at Jamestown Nature Reserve Oylegate owned by club member Will Warham. The workshop started at 10 with 12 participants and finished at 4. After a very welcome cup of tea or coffee Úna gave a presentation on the biology, lifecycle, and a guide to the identification of bumblebees of which I will give a short extract here:-

There are 250 species of bumblebee in the world mainly in the northern hemisphere and occur up to 80kms from the North Pole. In Ireland there are 20 species. They nest either on the surface of the ground or just underneath the surface perhaps in an old mouse nest. The lifecycle in brief is that the queen bumblebee emerges from hibernation in spring when she searches for a new nest site, prepares a pollen loaf and a nectar pot and lays some eggs that have been fertilised the previous year. These eggs hatch out into female workers. Later on the Queen lays unfertilised eggs which become male bumblebees. In late summer some new Queens emerge. The old Queen, workers and males die and the new fertilised Queens will then hibernate over the winter.

Some interesting facts about bumblebees

- Colours- Their favourite colours are blue, green, violet and purple.
- Stings - Only the females can sting.
- Honey – Most bumblebees do not in fact produce honey but the queen can fill a nectar pot to see them over a period of bad weather.
- Cuckoo bumblebees – These are clepto-parasites. In Ireland there are 6 cuckoo species. When the cuckoo bee enters a nest she kills the queen then lays her own eggs in the nest.
- Colony size and nest density – The average is 30-150 workers and 0-1.86 nests per hectare.
- Flight – Bumblebees can travel up to 5kms from the nest to forage.
- Struggling through the spring – In the nest there needs to be a temperature of 30c for approx.. 4 days for the eggs to hatch. The Queen needs to visit about 6000 flowers in spring to get enough nectar to sustain the nest. The flowers of Willow are crucial to this.
- Pollination – 100 crops provide 90% of food worldwide. 71 of these crops are bee pollinated and it is estimated that bees are worth 85 million to the economy.
- Decline – Worldwide there are 30 species threatened with extinction. In Ireland out of 20 species 4 are endangered and 2 are vulnerable.
- WHY – 1. Habitat loss 2. Decline in Wildflowers. 3. Pesticides

What action can we take – Support the data centre, Waterford. Make people more aware of the plight of the bumblebee.

How you can help – Report casual sightings to the data centre, take part in monitoring programmes, make your garden more bumblebee friendly. Plenty of help can be got from the data centre at www.biodiversityireland.ie or Tel 0510306240

These very interesting facts about bumblebees by Úna were followed by a crash course in bumblebee identification and followed by a splendid lunch outdoors in the lovely welcome sunshine.

After lunch the group went out into the field to try to catch some bees to identify the species. There were very few bees around despite some wonderful wildflowers out at the time and some good weather for the day. This was probably indicative of the 2013 season as a whole. The wet and disastrous summer of 2012 was followed by a very cold and long spring in 2013 making it difficult for bumblebees to survive.

The group were able to identify some of the more common species of bumblebee. These were – *Bombus terrestris* 2, *Bombus pascuorum* 7, *Bombus hortorum* 2, *Bombus pratorum* 2, *Bombus lapidarius* 1.

The consensus was that this workshop was very useful and informative and thanks go to Will Warham of Jamestown Nature Reserve for hosting the workshop and allowing the club to use his beautiful land and premises. Thanks also go to Dr. Úna for a very stimulating and thought provoking day on the plight of Bumblebees in our beautiful world. Hopefully we all went away determined to encourage more bees into our gardens and land and to do more recording of bees.







