



BURTON and District BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

*From the Newsletter Editor Margaret Cowley
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28th May

What amazing weather we have been having! Unfortunately my 2020 queens seem to have chosen the only cold, rainy and windy week this spring to go out mating. Both failed to return and establish a colony.

A lucky sequence of events meant that I was able to rescue the queenless bees: As I am on the BBKA swarm collector's map, I received a call about a swarm a few minutes walk away. Mindful of the shielding advice I dealt with it over the phone. I was soon in touch with a former student (much younger than me) who was keen to collect it and he would do so that afternoon.

A thought occurred to me - perhaps the swarm was from another former student, also living very nearby so I gave her a ring.....

"Yes" she said, "I lost one about 20 minutes ago!". But she didn't mind that someone else would benefit from it as the colony that was left was still strong.

Indeed she was happy to let me harvest a queen cell or two from her swarmed colony. They would only



A wonderful spring crop!

be murdered soon by the newly emerged queen if left there. And her colony consisted of the nicest bees I had come across for years.

So I collected two cells and put them in my queenless colonies. Things look good as pollen is again being brought in. I can't wait to have a peep to check all is well!

NOT honey bees! Suzanne King

The combination of lockdown and good weather meant that I was able to spend a lot more time catching up on some well overdue jobs in the garden (I am yet to sort out the shed that hasn't been touched since we moved in 20 years ago – always last on the list of jobs). This has meant I have also been able to watch the comings and goings of the wildlife in the garden. The blossom has been amazing this year and, in turn, the cherry tree, the apple trees and now the wisteria are a constant hum. The queen bumble bees were the biggest I have ever seen. But maybe it was just the time I had to watch for them.

Always on the lookout for Asian hornet queens and queen wasps, I have noticed what an amazing habitat our house is. We have bumble bees nesting in one wall behind the wisteria and I noted some solitary bees popping in and out of small holes in the mortar. High up above my bedroom window there were, I presume, some male solitary bees circling, awaiting the emergence of any females with which to mate.

I became so preoccupied with them that I was chasing them around the garden with the iPad trying to show my husband, who is working abroad, on Facetime. This is the husband who has never seen inside one of my beehives, so I am sure he was enthralled!

Whilst clearing out a flower bed, I noticed a flash of rusty red and once I had got my eye in and my phone out, managed to catch some pictures of a beautiful solitary bee, the tawny mining bee (*Andrena fulva* – *Andrena* from the Greek for strong, brave and *fulva* from the Latin for tawny).



Andrena fulva the tawny mining bee

There are around 250 species of bee in Britain that are NOT bumblebees or honey bees. These are the solitary bees. Incidentally there are 26 species of bumble bee and one honey bee to put the 250 species of solitary bee into perspective.

Of the various solitary bees, the mining bees are the largest group, including the tawny mining bee and the ashy mining bee (*Andrena cineraria*) which I also spotted in the garden – another very distinctive and beautiful bee.

Other groups are :

- flower bees – which include the hairy footed bee! (*Anthophora plumipes*)
- leaf-cutter bees – these are attracted to homemade bee hotels.
- sweat bees – these include the red mason bee (*Osmia bicornis*), also likely to take up residence in a bee hotel.

The female solitary bee works alone to find and provision a single cell nest. There are no non-reproductive workers. The mining bees burrow tunnels in the soil, laying down pollen and nectar, then laying an egg before closing off the entrance. On average about 5 eggs are laid in single cells. The eggs become larvae in a few days then feed on the nectar and pollen left by the mother.

They grow quickly and pupate within a few weeks. The adults emerge in spring, the males before the females. They mate, after which the male dies and the female starts to look for suitable nest sites. Whilst there is no cooperation between the females they may often construct nests close to each other in 'aggregations' – this may be in the thousands.

Follow this link to see the activity around a solitary bee house:

<https://youtu.be/FRxP61BgxCg>

Solitary bees do not make wax or honey. They carry pollen on their legs with specialised hairs called the scopa. These do not form a basket as in honey bees. Some solitary bees carry pollen on the underside of their abdomen also with specialised hairs. Some do not have specialised equipment at all and swallow the pollen, regurgitating it when required.

The tawny mining bee is said to prefer sandy soils, but I am happy to house her in my clay and stone garden. The females are covered in fox red hair on their backs with black on the underside. The males are more slender and yellower in appearance. *Andrena fulva* is active from the end of March to early June.

As she flies past, the ashy mining bee (*Andrena cineraria*) looks like a flash of blue, but actually has a shiny black abdomen with an attractive grey fur band like a muffler around her thorax and head. She is an important pollinator in orchards, so I can thank her for my yearly bumper crop of apples, but she is said to prefer tended lawns and flowerbeds, so she must be desperate to nest in my garden.

I hope you will also be able to catch sight of one of these lovely bees in the next few weeks before their life cycle is over for the season. Come July I guess I will have no excuse not to turn out that shed!

To Do List for June

- If the weather turns bad and you have harvested a honey crop, could your bees starve? Bear this in mind and feed if necessary, providing there are no supers which might be contaminated with syrup.
- Have ready the equipment needed to split strong colonies to prevent them swarming away, if you haven't already divided them this year.
- Check the natural varroa drop. A daily count of more than ten would indicate that immediate treatment is advisable.
- With good weather, before the top super is full of bees and nectar, add another.
- Keep an eye out for Asian hornets.

Who's Who

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Diary: All meetings are cancelled due to the Corona virus pandemic.