

Maria Himsworth's Chillenden Blog

July 2021

A Pollinating Buzz in my Rural Garden - A monthly look at how my rural garden is enjoyed by pollinating insects

I love my garden, not because of what it looks like but what it represents about me and my relationship with the environment around me. It continues to deliver interest every day and a walk around my garden in the early morning to discover what nature has accomplished over night with the help of the weather and the wildlife is often full of surprises. Nature is never predictable and each year in the garden is different. This year's weather has certainly brought nature's wildlife some challenges and in particular the long spells of heavy rain have impacted on both the variety and abundance of pollinators along with the flowering and growth rates of plants in my garden, some positive some negative.

It is good to share our nature experiences and at Kent Wildlife Trust this year Wild About Gardens Advisers have done just that by opening their gardens for the public to come along to and chat about their wildlife gardening experiences. My garden is open on the 29th of August this year in rural East Kent with the hope that I can share some of my wildlife gardening ideas in a small garden. Find out more about mine and other open gardens in Kent here

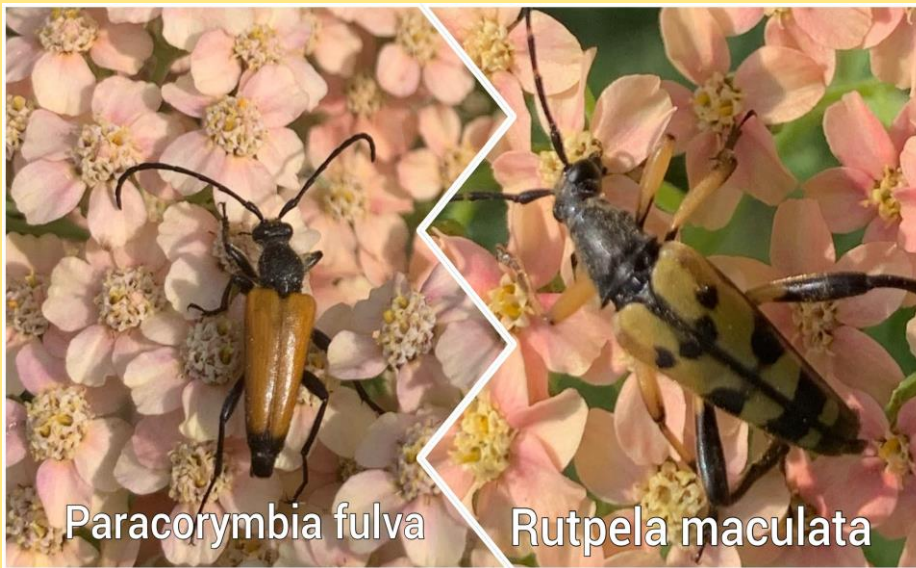
<https://www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/events?tags=1453>

What was buzzing in July

As I update my blog today it reminds me what a busy time of the year this is at home, as it is holiday time and just when we can all enjoy what we have created throughout the year in the garden it is also the time when we want to go visiting family and enjoying a break away to discover other cultures and environments. This year probably more than any we want to be out and about visiting friends and family again. But it has also been lovely to have family visit and to be able to share some time in the garden together again. How the grandchildren love to pond dip whilst the adults enjoy sitting and chatting in between the sudden downpours and gale force winds!

It is also a good time of the year to take part in Citizen science surveys such as the Big Butterfly Count that runs from 16th July to the 8th August here, <https://bigbutterflycount.butterfly-conservation.org> or maybe you did Plantlife's Every Flower Counts, a follow up from the May survey in July, here, <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/everyflowercounts/>

Flying beetles have turned their attention to the native Yarrow and hybrid Achillia now that the Oxeye Daisies have gone over. I spotted two species of Longhorn Beetles (*Cerambycidae*) that were not around last month. A Tawny Longhorn Beetle (*Paracorymbia fulva*) and the Spotted Longhorn Beetle (*Rutpela maculata*) larvae of Longhorns develop in old dead wood and tree stumps and are therefore good decomposers recycling nutrients through our ecosystem. Hopefully these adults I saw pollinating my Yarrow and Achillia will be happy laying their eggs in the plentiful dead wood I have in the garden, and they will be around again next year. There are 69 native species of Longhorns in the UK and they are of great ecological importance along with many other of our flying beetles.



Paracorymbia fulva

Rutpela maculata

I noticed several different species of Solitary bees this month in the garden when the sun was shining, in particular there are many more of our tiny weeny species that I would never have known as a bee until I started to study them. These included *Hylaeus* the Yellow-Faced bees. These bees like many species are mainly polylectic, meaning they will use several different plant genus. They will nest in pre-existing holes

such as in dead plant stems. Their characteristic yellow or white face markings make them easy to spot.

A tiny Yellow-faced bee sharing an Astrantia flower with a Nomad bee

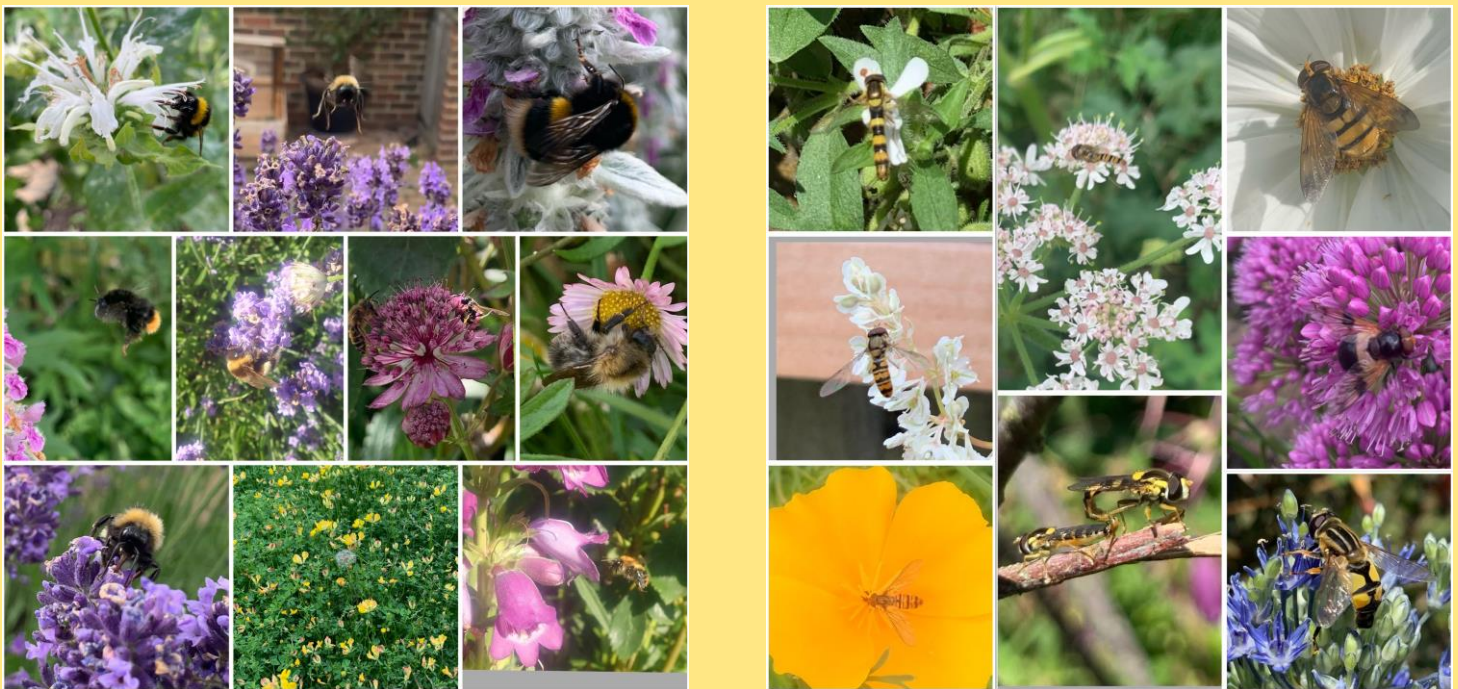
The Small Scissor Bee (*Chelostoma campanularum*) one of my favourite tiny bees to spot tucked inside Harebells. These tiny little bees are oligolectic meaning they only collect pollen from a single genus of plant and for this little scissor bee it is the Campanula species so look out for them if you have these flowers in your garden. They also nest in pre-existing holes and of course tiny ones! The Common Furrow Bee (*Lasioglossum claceatum*) can be eusocial therefore although they have individual nests they will be in small aggregations of others in their species and nest in light soil. The Clover Melitta (*Melitta leporina*), a good reason to let Clover grow in your grass as this little bee is so pretty. Again this bee nests in aggregations and apparently they will roost in cluster on Yarrow flowers. Davies' Colletes one of the main Colletes found in gardens and I love the genus Colletes with their clearly defined abdomen beautiful.





Bumblebees always become harder to identify as the summer sun fades their lovely colours and they become a little worn and battered from their busy foraging and this is the same for the solitary bees too. Our unseasonably wet weather has also taken its toll on our bees this year although Bumblebees can forage in wet weather the heavy torrential rain on their hairy bodies can make them become waterlogged and raindrops are heavy and can literally knock them out of the air and damage their wings. I have however still managed to keep lots of Bumblebees happy this July in the garden with plentiful flowers in small spaces to save them travelling too far. The Birds-foot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) has been prolific and continuous on my small back lawn keeping many pollinators happy. Other plants that seem to be popular this month are Penstemon, Astrantia, Lambs-ear and Cosmos.

Hoverflies included some of our large mimic species such as the Lesser Hornet Hoverfly (*Volucella inanis*), looking deceptively scary! I also had a stunning Sunfly (*Helophilus*), the larvae of this fly is the aquatic rat-tailed type that may nest in my Hoverfly Lagoon so fingers crossed.



Plentiful Bumblebees in the garden on sunny days and Hoverflies included this mating pair

At last this month a Wool Carder Bee (*Anthidium manicatum*) finally showed up in the garden stopping only briefly for a photo and I haven't seen one since. I also had a lovely Flower Bee (*Anthophora*) darting around with its high pitched buzz around my Lambs-ear flowers. Lambs-ear flowers have certainly been very popular with a wide variety of bees this month and Wool Carder bees also carder the fibres from the leaves and stems to create their nest cells.

When attracting pollinators to your garden it is important to consider not only their preferred flower type but also where they will nest and what nesting material they use. For our Bumblebees and Solitary Bees it is more about the nesting location and the availability forage close by. Social bees such as our Bumblebees cannot dig out a nest and their choice of nests range from old mouse holes to grassy tussocks where the space is large enough to rear their young. Your bee hotels may not only attract mason bees but also our Leafcutter Bees, Yellow-faced Bees and if you are lucky the Wool-Carder Bee but they will also need the right type of material to create the cells and seal off the hollow stem. Mining Bees and some other solitary bees will nest in bare soil and sandy banks and in existing soft cavities of walls and where they like to be social they need a larger area to house all their mates!

For Butterflies, Hoverflies and Beetles usually the habitat they choose is also going to provide food for their larvae when the eggs hatch and for this it is often native plants that are the food source. So if you want to attract your favourite butterfly to your garden consider what the caterpillars feed on as well as providing a nectar source for the adult and you are more likely to be successful. Many of our Butterflies need nettle as a food source for their caterpillars so if you do have an area where you can allow nettles to grow and you are more likely to see more butterflies in the garden. Some of our species will only lay their eggs on one specific plant making it more vulnerable to habitat loss, I have a patch of Kidney Vetch in my garden ever hopeful that the gorgeous Small Blue Butterfly (*Cupido minimus*) will appear.



A Flower Bee feeding on Lambs-ear and a Wool Carder Bee

Maria Himsworth - Follow my sightings on Twitter @HimsworthM