

Insects in Tattenhall garden on 16th April: main focus on bees and butterflies

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Number of species of each type of insect found:

Bee	13
Bee-fly	1
Butterfly	7
Hoverfly	8
Shieldbug	1

The majority were found feeding or looking for food for their nests on comfrey, bulbous buttercup, dandelion and forget-me-not.....despite everything else in flower!

There were seven types of bumblebee, mostly large queens, recently out of hibernation, and flying low over the grass to look for old mouse holes in which to make a nest, or in trees for a nest site; several were also feeding themselves up to get the energy for the work ahead. There were also some workers – newly-hatched daughters from new nests – working hard to collect pollen and nectar to feed the next batch of developing workers in the nest.



**Buff-tailed bumblebee queen – the most common at the moment,
and the target of the Southern Cuckoo bee, which looks very similar.**

One large female bumblebee (the Southern Cuckoo bee) was casing the meadow, not for her own nest site, but to find the nest of another bumblebee, the Buff-tailed bumblebee, so she can go in, kill the Buff-tail queen, and take over her nest, her workers, and the food stocks.

Several Hairy-footed flower bees were hovering and darting between flowers, behaving more like hoverflies than bees. They look like bumblebees, but are in fact one of the UK's solitary bees.



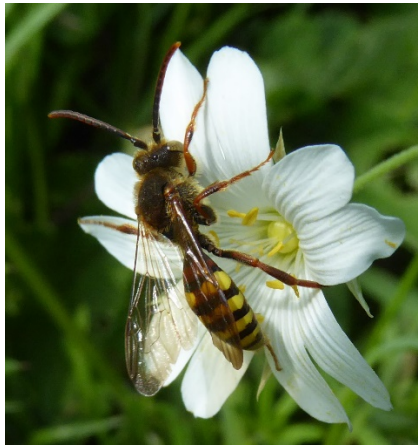
A Hairy-footed flower bee hovers in front of a flower; this one is a male, and has the hairy legs (and feet!), unlike the female, which is black with orange back legs.

Two species of mining bees were collecting food to stock up the tiny tunnels they dig in the grass, where they will lay 10 or so eggs before closing up the tunnel, and repeating the process a few times in their short life time. They are two of our 270 species of solitary bee in this country, mostly overlooked because they are not present in great numbers at one time like the honey bee.



The Orange-tailed mining bee is about half the size of a honey bee.

There were two other types of solitary bees, which are cuckoos on some of these mining bees, and were resting on the same plants as their hosts.



**A bee, not a wasp! Tiny, delicate, but out to lay their own eggs
in the nest of another species, like cuckoos.**

Some of the butterflies I saw will have recently emerged, having spent the winter as a caterpillar or chrysalis – Holly Blues, the first blues to emerge, Orange-tips with their distinctive colours, Speckled Woods, spiralling furiously up into the air in pairs as males defend their territories. Some, though, will have overwintered as adults: the bright yellow male Brimstone butterfly, and the darker Peacock flying over the pond.



A speckled wood butterfly stakes out its territory

The fluffy round bee-fly was flicking its eggs into the mouth of a mining bee's nest, so its young can attack and eat the bee's larvae.



Bee-flies have a long proboscis which they use as they hover in front of flowers to feed.

Eight species of hoverfly were identified, hovering around flowers or warming up in pools of sun. They are great pollinators, many are predators of aphids, and they are a sensitive indicator of the health of the environment.



One of many of the black and yellow species of hoverfly

The hairy shieldbugs were clustered on one plant in a border. At this time of year, they will be emerging to mate.



Hairy shield bug, one of only a handful of shieldbugs in this part of the country