

Your guide to eight common bees in the UK



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Buff-tailed bumblebee

Bombus terrestris

Queens and males have buff orange coloured tails, but worker's tails are often white. The yellow bands on the bee's body are darker than the lemony yellow bands of a white-tailed bumblebee. Buff-tailed bumblebees are probably our most common and widespread bumblebee, and you can see them from March-November, though they can also make winter-active nests.



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Red mason bee

Osmia bicornis

The red mason bee nests in hollow plant stems, holes in cliffs, and the crumbling mortar of old buildings. It's a solitary bee, so after mating, each female builds its own nest in which to lay her eggs. She lines each egg's cell with mud, pollen and nectar and fills up the cavity with individual egg cells. The larvae hatch and develop, pupating in autumn and hibernating over winter to emerge as adults the following spring.



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Early bumblebee

Bombus pratorum

The early bumblebee is a common, widespread species with yellow bands and a red tail. They are usually quite small compared to other bumblebee species. Rarely seen after July, they build their nests in early spring, hence their name!



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Red-tailed bumblebee

Bombus lapidarius

The queens and workers are all black with a red tail while the males have some yellow hair on their face and thorax. Red-tailed bumblebees like to nest underground, often in old vole burrows, under stones, or at the base of old walls.



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Tree bumblebee

Bombus hypnorum

A recent immigrant from mainland Europe, the tree bumblebee has naturalised itself in the UK. It is a unique brown, black and white bumblebee that nests above ground in bird boxes, lofts and old woodpecker holes.



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Common carder bee

Bombus pascuorum

The ginger teddy bear bee! This is the only common and widespread ginger bumblebee, they sometimes have a very dark abdomen and can range in size. Common carder bees are one of a number of 'long-tongued bees' that can feed on flowers with long tubular florets, such as foxglove, clover and lavender. Common carder bees like to nest in areas of long, tussocky grass.



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White-tailed bumblebee

Bombus lucorum

The white-tailed bumblebee has a pure white tail and lemon-yellow bands across its body. The males have yellow facial hair and moustaches. They can be seen from April to November, and they like to nest in old rodent holes and compost heaps.



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Tawny mining bee

Andrena fulva

One of our most recognisable spring-flying bees, the tawny mining bee has red/orange hair, and females can often be found nesting beside one another in large groups (although they build their own individual nests). They are commonly found in urban parks and gardens, creating their nests along south-facing embankments of bare earth or in mown lawns.