

## Let Nature take its course?

We have known that species of animals and plants are becoming extinct as a result of the human influence on the environment over the last century but there was something very terrible when “Sudan”, the last male Northern White Rhinoceros died a couple of years ago. It was a result of poaching, loss of territory, and because there were too few individuals left to carry on breeding. Other extinctions of a much less obvious type are also happening.

The Great yellow bumblebee, *Bombus distinguendus*, could be found all over the UK in the 1960s but is now confined to the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. It needs a certain kind of habitat for its survival but it has been driven northwards by global warming. Bumblebees evolved in the Himalayas and they cannot cope with sustained high temperatures, partly because of their fur coats and rotund heat-conserving shape.

The most recent bumblebee species to be lost from our fauna was the **Short-haired bumblebee**, *Bombus subterraneus*. It too was common from the south east of England up as far as Humberside until the 1960s but it steadily disappeared until the last one was seen in Kent in 1988 . It was declared extinct in 2000. The Bumblebee Conservation Trust ran a 10-year project in North Kent to re-establish the species using stock from mainland Europe. Working with all sorts of landowners, they reversed the effects of land-drainage to recreate a suitable habitat but permanent colonies could not be established. However, three other seriously threatened UK species have returned and are thriving again.



If “letting Nature take its course” means allowing the (man-made) status quo to persist, the environment will continue to fail its inhabitants and more species will be lost. Recording the decline will not help them to survive either. The current trend to apply all that we have learned about the subject, and putting it into practice without delay, will bring benefits to all species.



In terms of our wild pollinators, it is a matter of growing appropriate plants, excluding pesticides, providing suitable habitats for nesting and hibernating, and encouraging people to do what they can to help. Can you make space for Wallflower, Cosmos, **Cornflower**, Field poppy, Scabious or Dahlia this year? It will attract bees to your garden where they will pollinate your fruit trees, beans etc. as well as keeping you entertained for weeks.