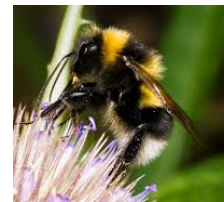


## Bumblebee aware October 2019

Almost every example of wildlife, whether animal or plant, is preparing for the hardships and challenges of Winter as November approaches. We have all seen the swifts flying away, the leaves falling off the trees, the tired look of the floral borders, and the squirrels busily planting hazel nuts where the ground is soft enough. Other preparations are taking place out of sight. All sorts of plants are topping up their reserves in tap roots. Mammals, and insects that live for more than one Summer, need to identify and defend a safe hibernation site.

Of course, our furry friends the bumblebees are included in this search for a safe haven. If your garden has been brightened by dazzling displays of colour this year, displays that will have attracted clouds of pollinators, you may have seen a queen bee carefully burrowing into soft soil in a flower bed. Bumblebees are not equipped for digging but they look for nesting and hibernation sites below the surface where they will be safe.



If you wish to help their survival you might loosen the top six inches of a bit of ground against a North-facing bank, hedge or wall, and cover it with a few extra inches of compost or rotted manure. Obviously this should not be in a part of the garden that is regularly disturbed by pets.



The inability of bumblebees to dig has made them reliant on mice to provide the ideal nesting sites. The other huge advantage is that an old mouse burrow is full of finely chewed paper and plant material that forms excellent insulation for developing eggs and larvae in the Spring. Wasps, ants and some solitary bees do collect bedding material but

bumblebees do not, perhaps they do not have the figure for it! It has been shown that the smell of mouse urine, and the way that it shows up in ultra violet light, allow bumblebees to locate old burrows.

In the new year I hope to make some attractive underground nest sites to help our pollinators to flourish. We know just how to fill our gardens with suitable flowers but providing housing is a big challenge across the UK. If any of our readers have access to used mouse-bedding, I would love to know about it so that I could collect some in the Spring. On the other hand, if you need suggestions about other ways of helping pollinators by what you build or plant, then please e-mail me at [buzz@bumblebee.myzen.co.uk](mailto:buzz@bumblebee.myzen.co.uk).

*Adrian Doble (13 October 2019 Member and volunteer with the Bumblebee Conservation Trust)*