

The Tree Bumblebee

article by David Smith

The tree bumblebee was first recorded in Britain in 2001 at Landford in Wiltshire. Since then its spread across the UK has been spectacular, particularly in the Home Counties, and by the end of 2010 it had been recorded as far as Northumberland in the north and Wales in the west. In 2009 there had been several records in the Leeds area and in 2010 Paul Holmes recorded it in Ox Close wood in East Keswick..

Early in April this year I noticed one of the bird boxes in my garden had been colonized by bumblebees;... this is not unusual as bees and wasps occasionally do set up home in empty bird boxes. I have been recording the different species of bumblebee for the 10 year natural history survey of the parish. In May I noticed an unusual bumblebee on pansies in my garden.

I recognized this as being different from the other species of bees I had recorded. It was a Tree Bumblebee with its very distinctive ginger thorax, black abdomen and white tail. Being inquisitive as to where it had come from, I took a closer look at the colony of bees in our bird box and discovered that this was a colony of the Tree bumblebee *Bombus hypnorum*. Since then I have seen many individuals of this species in East Keswick, collecting nectar and pollen from several plants in my garden and around the village. I mentioned this to Ray Baker from Bardsey, a keen local naturalist, who was unaware of its expansion across the UK. He soon reported back to me that it was also widespread in Bardsey.

As I kept my bird box colony under

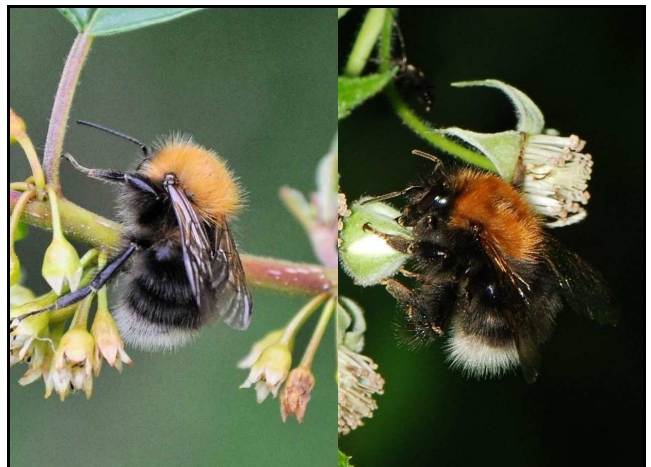
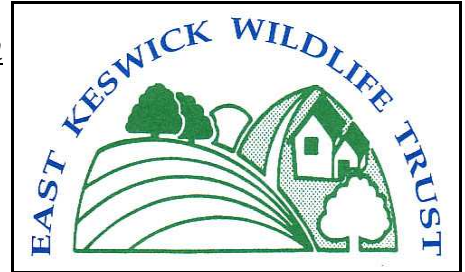
observation, I also noticed bees patrolling back and forth between this box and another just a short distance away. They did not enter either box and it looked as if they could not

locate the entrance. I have since discovered that this is the patrolling behaviour of the male bees waiting for young queens to emerge from the nest so they can be first to mate with them. This was early in the season so perhaps Tree bumblebees produce many queens early in the year. These newly mated queens fly many miles away to found new colonies;... a possible reason for its rapidly

expanding range across the UK. My bird box colony died out in early summer, and I saw far fewer individuals later in the year compared with the spring.

The continued expansion of the Tree bumblebee across the UK can only be good news as several of our other species are in decline and some have disappeared from areas where they were once common. So a new pollinator for our trees and flowers is a welcome addition.

2011 seems to have been another good year for this species; no doubt the warm spring weather in April will have benefited the newly emerging queens looking for new nest sites. Take a good look at the photos of the tree bumble bee and see if you can spot one next year, if you have any sightings of



Bombus hypnorum on Alder Buckthorn (L) and Raspberry (R)

bumblebees colonising your bird boxes in 2012 please give me a call or send me an email as I would like to know if using bird boxes as a nesting site will be a regular occurrence for this new addition to our parish wildlife.

Autumn Talk

Wednesday
16th November
at 8.00pm.

In the Methodist Church
Meeting Room.

“Ox Close... Past Present
and Future”.

An illustrated talk
by members of the
Wildlife Trust.

Seasons' Summary

by Paul Holmes

Wildlife apparently has been affected more by the warm dry spring than by the very cold but thankfully dry winter - (see Autumn 2010 Newsletter). The effect of the warm spring was that the flowering of plants and the emergence of invertebrates were brought forward quite considerably. Read on....

Since writing the last newsletter, East Keswick has had a couple of "firsts for Yorkshire" dragonfly sightings which were noted in the website of the British Dragonfly Society www.british-dragonflies.org.uk. On the 17th April, a Large Red Damselfly was seen in Ox Close wood when previous sightings in the UK had been only as far north as Norfolk. Then on the 6th July, Phil Hirst found Southern Hawker Dragonflies emerging from his garden pond. Previous sightings for the year had been on the south coast! Also on the 17th April we saw Brimstone butterflies laying eggs on the Alder Buckthorn that had been planted in the Ox Close in 2003 in the hope of encouraging this species to breed. This year's egg laying was some

three weeks earlier than last year and this report was worthy enough to be commented on in the "Wildlife Reports" of the nationwide British Wildlife Magazine.

In this years spring issue of the newsletter, we commented that we hoped to finally eradicate Himalayan Balsam from the Marsh. With the help of the Scouts, Guides, Brownies and Cubs (and many thanks to them!) we think we have succeeded. We have followed up their hard work with an occasional work party visit to pull up remaining stragglers.

The Friday work parties also pulled Balsam from the river bank in Ox Close wood.

Unfortunately one day we got too close to a wasp's nest. It seems that the nest had been previously disturbed by badgers, so the wasps were particularly sensitive and we were at least 15m away when we were all stung 4 or 5 times. These wasps were later identified as the German Wasp (*Vespula*

germanica). Because of the aggressive nature of this nest and its proximity to the path, we decided it prudent to chemically destroy the colony... something that we would normally try to avoid. In comparison, the colony of the Norwegian Wasp, *Dolichovespula norwegica*, nesting in a tree further up the river were positively benign and allowed us to inspect their nest at close quarters.

Because of the dry summer, one of the losers has been the fungi. Apart from some spectacular specimens of Fly Agaric, there have been very few fungi species and fruiting bodies.



Wasps can be identified by their facial markings. Left- Common Wasp (*Vespula vulgaris*). Above left- Norwegian Wasp, and above- German Wasp.



Southern Hawker Dragonfly, characterised by the two broad stripes on the front of its thorax.



Large Red Damselfly

It is gratifying to know that the newsletter helps maintain member numbers.

Many thanks for your continuing membership.

We want to know what is in our reserves. If you have any photos of anything you consider unusual, please drop me a line: Details at the bottom of p.4. We want to include as much as we can in the 10 year Nat History Survey.

The Elm... A British Native Tree

by Andy Turner

Some of us are old enough to be able to remember the English landscape with its hedgerows peppered with the statuesque English Elm *Ulmus procera*. Sadly the landscape has changed because most mature elms have been lost through Dutch Elm disease. This is a fungus (*Ophiostoma novo-ulmi*) that blocks vessels in the metabolic system of the tree and is carried from tree to tree by two species of bark beetles. The beetle eats through the bark, leaving the fungus inside the tree, and also lays eggs that hatch into burrowing larvae. The disease is also transmitted from tree to tree via the root system of the elm.

Because the beetle has had such a devastating effect on elms there are only a few isolated trees that remain unaffected, for example, I know of two mature elms at Green Hammerton. However, there is an area in the south-east of England from Worthing to the west of Beachy Head that has a substantial number of unaffected elms and consequently still retains that unique landscape. The elms are protected from the beetle by the sea and the adjacent elm-free chalklands. There are many younger, healthy elm trees that one can see in the hedgerows and in woods such as Ox Close wood, as it seems that the elm beetle does not affect these younger trees as much as the older trees.

The English Elm is a large tree with a height reaching 36m and has a dark brown bark that is deeply cracked into small rectangular plates. The wood is very hard, durable in wet conditions and is difficult to split. Most of the steps leading up into Ox Close wood have been constructed using elm from the wood, chosen for its durability.

Elm rarely produces good seed and instead uses root suckers to spread the species. It has dark red flowers that

are clustered on small shoots and which open in late February until early March. The photograph of the flower is not of an English Elm but is from one of the many elms in Ox Close wood, thought to be Dutch Elms (*Ulmus hollandica*).

Traditionally Elm was used for cattle fodder and for marking boundaries, thus their presence in many

hedges. The durability of the wood led to it being used in the past for water pipes, watermill wheel blades, boat building and underwater works at docks. It was also used for seats of chairs, particularly the Windsor chair. Apparently, in ancient times a decoction of the bark in water was used by charcoal burners to bathe burns. The unfortunate lack of mature elms today means that the wood is seldom used. The only elm now found, and this is becoming increasingly rare, is from old felled trees and is mainly used for turnery and decorative purposes (the picture shows the attractive grain of an old plank of elm).

The caterpillars of the White-letter Hairstreak butterfly feed exclusively on elm leaves. The butterfly can be seen in some years at Ox Close wood from July to mid August, particularly on the top ride.



Elm flower buds about to open



Elms in Green Hammerton



Elm plank showing attractive grain effects

Friday Workparties

Your Wildlife Trust belongs to East Keswick and has become one of the assets of the village. In that respect, it's quite special. Through leading Friday Work Picnics over the last 15 months, I've been privileged in helping the Trust carry out more regular hands-on work to improve your wild places. My professional input has been boosted immeasurably by the hard work and dedication of the Trust's members. In addition to the feel-good factors of doing healthy exercise in green places to help wildlife, much enjoyment and warm companionship has come through a fellowship of volunteers that is both welcoming and inclusive.

You are invited to become a character in our Weekly News too, written in breathless Enid Blyton-style tongue-in-cheek prose, with a view to extending our *esprit de corps* and fun. Already we've enhanced a new site, Beevers Meadow, are conquering the alien invader in the Marsh, and in Ox Close Wood, improved paths, tracks and rides for wildlife and people. The amazing grant from the Big Lottery Community Wildlife Fund is a boon, and will allow us to up the ante and achieve even more! Yes, you may get mucky during and ache afterwards, but if you're reading this and appreciate humour, baked potatoes, cake and

possible post-task liquid refreshment, then we look forward to seeing you at Greenfields at 9am one Friday. If new, perhaps best to check first. The more you put in the more you get out, as they say.

by Nick Haslewood

Editor's note – Without Nick's professional help in habitat management, we would not have achieved anywhere near as much as we have. If you would like to be involved, contact me at the email address below or phone 01937 574140

Lottery Funding

The Trust was successful in applying for a grant of £5,500 to improve access into and around Ox Close Wood and to produce public information boards. Work is well underway; a local contractor has improved the vehicle access track and the Friday voluntary work parties are improving the rides in the wood. The notice boards are at the printing stage and if all goes to plan will be on site by the New Year.

New Subscription Rates

In order to maintain our current level of conservation activity at our three local sites, we have had to review our subscription rates for the first time in ten years. From April 2012, annual membership will be £20 for a family, £12 single and £7 concession. Life membership can now be offered at £300 for single membership. Please ensure your standing orders are amended in good time. Thank you for your support.

Forthcoming Events 2011-12

Wednesday 16th November.

Autumn Talk. "Ox Close.... Past Present and Future". An illustrated talk by members of the Trust. Meet at 8.00pm in the Methodist Church Meeting Room.

Sunday 18th December.

Christmas Walk. Following the Leeds Country Way along Wike Ridge, then via Hollin Hall to Harewood. Meet at 10.30am at The Duke of Wellington. Return transport provided.

Sunday 8th January 2012

Winter work party. Meet at Crabtree Lane car park 10am.

Sunday 12th February

Winter bird survey. Meet outside the Post Office at 10am

Sunday 26th February

Winter work party. Meet at Crabtree Lane car park 10am.

Saturday 21st April

Charcoal burn in Ox Close. Meet at the kilns at 2pm.

Monday 7th May

Bluebell Walk in Ox Close Wood. Meet at Crabtree Lane car park at 7pm.

Wednesday 16th May

AGM 8pm in the Methodist Church Meeting Room. Speaker to be arranged.

We need your help

Volunteers are needed for conservation work, even if you only have half an hour to spare your help would be invaluable.

Please contact us if you would like to be involved in charcoal burning and/or work parties on the reserves.

For updates of our events on the Web visit

www.eastkeswick.org.uk then click on **Wildlife Trust**.

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For more details of any of the Trust's activities: tel. 01937 574140

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