

## Pollinator Patch with Juliet from Hive Helpers

### What have you seen today?

We are all on the look-out for signs of spring, this year more than ever. Sunny days are greeted like a lottery win, putting a smile on everyone's faces. We wait greedily for the first spring flowers to emerge, like crocuses, daffodils and primroses, and the bees are waiting too, for that early spring nectar and pollen which is so vital to them. The earliest pollinators you might see are the large queens of the buff-tailed bumblebee (*Bombus terrestris*), on the look-out for a suitable nesting site. They are easy to spot because of their size! Another early visitor is the hairy-footed flower bee, one of the many solitary bees which visit our gardens, particularly in the south of the country.

### Bee of the month – Hairy-footed flower bee

The hairy-footed flower bee (*Anthophora plumipes*) looks a little like a bumblebee in that it's very furry, and only a little smaller than buff-tailed workers. Like all solitary bees, the previous year's queen will have laid her eggs singly and provisioned them with pollen and nectar, after which she dies, and the bees emerge the following spring. Mud and clay walls and banks of bare earth on south-facing sites may be used for nests, and after the last egg has been laid, it will be sealed with mud and water, licked into shape by the bee!



Hairy-footed flower bee/Alex Potts

The gingery males are the first to emerge, in March or sometimes even February. They sport long hairs on their legs and feet designed to attract the females, which emerge a couple of weeks later and are slightly less hairy and black. Both sexes are excellent pollinators, trapping pollen all over their hairy bodies! Although they look a little like bumblebees, the males have a very different, high-pitched buzz, together with a fast, hovering flight, and you may be able to spot them hovering around one of their favourite plants, lungwort.

### Pollinator plant of the month – lungwort

Lungwort (*Pulmonaria officinalis*) is a low-growing, spring-flowering herbaceous plant which thrives in shade. It can be easily identified by its mottled leaves, thought to resemble lung (pulmonary) diseases, and in fact lungworts were traditionally used to treat lung infections. There are several species and hybrids with different flower colours, but the common lungwort emerges as pink, soon changing to blue. The funnel-shaped flowers which emerge in early spring are what attracts our friend the hairy-footed flower bee, which, unusually for solitary bees, has a long tongue, enabling it to feed from deep-tubed flowers.

### Other March plants for pollinators

Another plant loved by long-tongued pollinators is our native primrose (*Primula vulgaris*). Spring-flowering hellebores, including the native stinking hellebore (*Helleborus foetidus*) are also good sources of early nectar and pollen – and don't forget to leave your dandelions to flower!

For a comprehensive list of plants for pollinators, visit:

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/science/research/plants-for-pollinators> and download the garden plants list.

For more information about Hive Helpers, please visit [www.hivehelpers.co.uk](http://www.hivehelpers.co.uk) , email us on [office@hivehelpers.co.uk](mailto:office@hivehelpers.co.uk) or phone us on 07895 547637.