

## Pollinator Patch with Juliet from Hive Helpers

### Ne'er cast a clout till May is out

This old saying could refer to the month of May, and the fickleness of our weather, but it could equally well apply to one of our loveliest native trees, the hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) which flowers in May, hence its common name. It is sometimes confused with blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) which has similar white, frothy blossom, but with blackthorn, the flowers appear first, in March or April, whereas with hawthorn, the fresh green leaves appear first, followed by the white or pink-red blossoms in May.

### Bee walks



I took a short walk around Farnham Community Farm last month with our beekeeper Erica and was amazed at the number of wild bees we saw. You probably remember April as being windy and rainy, but we also had an unusually mild spell which brought the pollinators out. The farm has wildflower strips all around the vegetable growing area which we help maintain, and among other things we saw common carder bumblebees, buff-tailed bumblebees, hairy-footed flower bees and the first tawny mining bee we'd seen this season.

The Bumblebee Conservation Trust runs BeeWalk, the national recording scheme for bumblebees, with volunteers who identify and count the bumblebees they see on a fixed route walked each month from March to October. The data is added to the BeeWalk database to increase the knowledge of bumblebee populations and distribution. For more information, see <https://www.bumblebeeconservation.org/surveys/>

### No Mow May

Here we are again with Plantlife's annual campaign asking all gardeners, councils and landowners not to mow until the end of May, in order to boost the flowers and nectar available to pollinating insects. I have been pleased to see so many dandelions adorning our roadside verges, such a good source of early nectar, and I even spotted a blue heart in Rowledge to indicate that the area had been deliberately left wild and was not laziness on the part of the owners! I still haven't persuaded my husband though...

### Pollinator plant of the month

One of the best shrubs for bees this month is the wall cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster horizontalis*). It is a fairly low, horizontally spreading shrub which in my garden has made quite a large fan shape against the front wall of the house. I am always amazed at the noise of the bees coming from this shrub, even before the flowers open. In fact, the flowers seem to be most attractive before they open, with the honey bees and bumblebees pushing their tongues into the red buds to get the nectar just before they bloom. The small pink-white flowers also attract them but not in such large numbers. The result of all this activity is, of course, the red berries which are loved by birds later in the year. However, this plant is a non-native species and is potentially invasive - the RHS advises seeking an alternative if your garden borders open countryside or a nature reserve. Thankfully I'm not in that category!