

Pollinator Patch with Juliet from Hive Helpers

Never stop wondering

My daughter once had a mug with a picture of Winnie the Pooh and Piglet on it, and the words “Never stop wondering”. I don’t think it’s a direct quote from A. A. Milne’s immortal bear (although he did a lot of wondering), but the words could be a slogan to encourage people to connect with the natural world and help save it. As Rachel Carson put it in her visionary book *Silent Spring* (1962), “The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, the less taste we shall have for destruction”. We have to care enough about the environment to want to protect it, and this starts with opening our eyes to what is all around us. At Hive Helpers, we try to inspire the members of our various groups to do just that.

Pollinator plant of the month – Devil’s-bit scabious

This pretty little scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) is still flowering as I write, its lilac pincushion flower heads often seen in damp places and along river banks. Other scabious you may have in your garden include the field scabious (*Knautia arvensis*) and the small scabious (*Scabiosa columbaria*) and they are all magnets for bees, butterflies, moths, hoverflies and beetles. The Devil’s-bit scabious is the best autumn-flowering species, according to bumblebee expert Dave Goulson, and it is also the food plant of the declining Marsh fritillary butterfly (*Euphydryas aurinia*). The Devil’s-bit part of the name, by the way, refers to the fact that the roots are truncated as if bitten off, legend has it, by the Devil!



Southern cuckoo bumblebee on scabious by Alex Potter

Bee of the month – Small scabious mining bee

As its name suggests, the small scabious mining bee (*Andrena marginata*) is a scabious specialist, and like all mining bees, digs holes in the ground to lay her eggs in. She collects pollen from the Devil’s-bit scabious on special hairs on her legs, and puts it in the nest with the eggs to feed the larvae until they emerge. This bee is endangered and found only in small pockets in the South/South East, south Wales and Scottish Highlands.

Other October plants for pollinators

Fuchsia species, dahlias with open flowers such as Bishop of Llandaff and salvia species continue to flower in October (and beyond if we’re lucky) and provide much needed late nectar. Bees on the wing at this time of year are likely to be new bumblebee queens stocking up before winter hibernation, the hardy common carder bumblebee (*Bombus pascuorum*) and honey bee workers still foraging for their winter stores. The hardy plumbago (*Ceratostigma plumbaginoides*), which I’ve grown for years, is my new favourite shrub, with its small, brilliant blue flowers and good autumn foliage – it’s great for pollinators at this time of year and has obligingly seeded itself around the garden. I was very pleased to read in a recent issue of the RHS *Garden* magazine that this is a good plant for both drought and flood!