

Pollinator Patch with Juliet from Hive Helpers

The magic of pollination

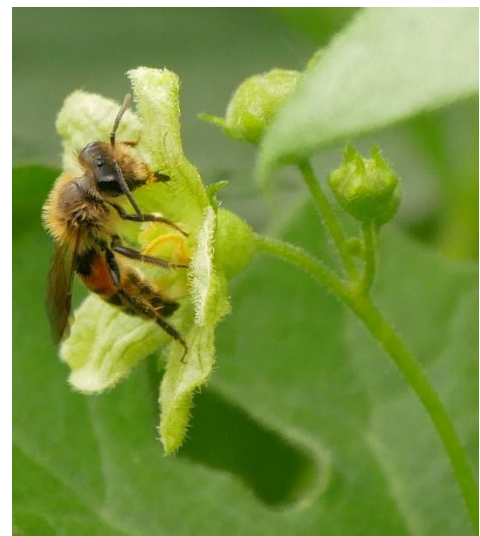
Since the spring, Erica and I have been running our popular pollinator workshops for local primary schools. Our double act is now a well-rehearsed routine which seems to go down well. We ask the children what they know about bees, show them children how the smoker works, and explain the magic of pollination. Two volunteer 'flowers' are sprinkled with 'pollen' (actually semolina!) and Brenda, our pretend bee, flies between the two, showing how pollen is spread from one flower to another. Using an ingenious felt flower which Erica designed to show how a flower develops into a fruit, we explain what happens when the male pollen makes contact with the female part of the flower. Using a felt pollen grain and a thread, we show how the pollen grain grows a hairlike tube down towards the unripe seeds inside. Once fertilised, the seed receives the message to ripen and the surrounding tissue grows and swells into the fruit and vegetables we love to eat. Pollination is a complex process, but we hope we have sown the seeds (forgive the pun!) of understanding in the children.

Pollinator plant of the month – Bryony

There are, in fact, two types of our native bryony: white bryony (*Bryonia dioica*) and black bryony (*Dioscorea communis*). Considered as a weed by some gardeners when it smothers smaller plants and grows in formal hedges, it is a nevertheless a good plant for a wildlife garden: flowers for the bees and red berries (poisonous to us) for the birds. The white bryony came to my attention on one of our recent bee safaris, where it was clambering amongst the vegetation outside the Farnham Castle walls. One of our safari regulars managed to photograph it with its companion pollinator, the Bryony mining bee.

Wild bee of the month – Bryony mining bee

The Bryony mining bee (*Andrena florea*) is relatively rare, being confined to southern England. It is notable as being one of the very few bees in Britain that visits only a single flower species for pollen, although it will visit other flowers for nectar. It is a solitary bee, and like all mining bees, it makes nest burrows in the soil, where the female will lay her eggs and provision them for when they hatch into larvae, with the young bees emerging the following year. Erica was very excited that a Bryony mining bee had been spotted on safari and was determined to see one for herself. She didn't have far to go – she discovered one in Farham Library Gardens where there are several white bryony plants.



Other July plants for pollinators

The beautiful blue flowers of perennials sea holly (*Eryngium*) and globe thistle (*Echinops*) are magnets for bees – my *Echinops* has outgrown its space and was towering over the roses and phlox in the bed. I decided to give it the Chelsea chop (cutting it down by about a third) which will delay flowering by a few weeks, but I have plenty else in my garden for the pollinators at this time of year, including the purple toadflax (*Linaria purpurea*) which they love above all else, as well as various agastache and salvia species.