

## Pollinator Patch with Juliet from Hive Helpers

### Hebrides Overture

No, I haven't strayed into classical music territory this month, I just wanted to tell you about my recent trip to the Outer Hebrides. I was going in search of the great yellow bumblebee (*Bombus distinguendus*), a very scarce species seen only in the far north-west of Scotland, Orkney and some of the Hebridean islands. These islands, right on the very western edge of the UK, are remote and extraordinary, with an otherworldly feel rather like the Isles of Scilly (but with worse weather!). In fact, we were very lucky with the weather, with plenty of sunshine and blue skies, a lull between two ferocious storms. I'll never forget the sight of Luskentyre Beach unfolding before us as we bridged a hill in Harris, white sands and turquoise seas stretching out as far as the eye could see. Who needs the Caribbean?

The great yellow is found in machair grasslands in the Hebridean islands of North and South Uist. Machair is not a single habitat type, it is a complex mosaic of sand dune, coastal grassland, dune slack and marsh, formed over thousands of years by human settlement and agriculture. Machair grassland in full flower is quite a spectacle – we were a bit late for the full range of flowers, but red clover and knapweed were still bravely flowering, even in late September. The lack of flowers could account for my not finding the great yellow, but I did spot a moss carder bee (*Bombus muscorum*) on one of the islands.

### Pollinator plant of the month – Common knapweed

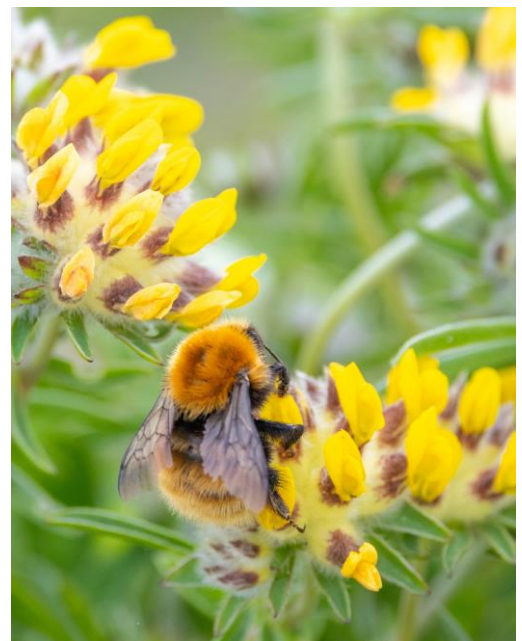
Common knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*) may not be flowering by the time you read this, but it has been going longer than usual, thanks to the above-average temperatures we have been experiencing in October. It has a thistle-like purple flower and can be found in all sorts of grasslands and is considered by some to be invasive, so one for the wildflower meadows perhaps (although I wouldn't mind it in my garden!). It is a huge favourite with butterflies, moths, and bees.

### Bee of the month – Moss carder bee

The moss carder bee is another scarce bumblebee, and there are several island colour forms found particularly in the Outer Hebrides, Shetland, Scillies and the Channel Islands. These have dark ginger thoraxes (the one I saw was a red-head!) and tend to feed on red clover and bird's foot trefoil.

### Other November plants for pollinators

Winter-flowering honeysuckle (*Lonicera fragrantissima*) is a good source of nectar for late-flying bees, including the common carder bumblebee (*Bombus pascuorum*) which can be active into November. I have also seen these tough little bees with their gingery thoraxes on my hardy fuchsias and geraniums, which are still flowering as I write, as are some of my salvias - all are good for pollinators. Hardy geraniums are as tough as old boots, but salvias can be a tad tender, particularly on heavy soil like mine, so I was pleased the cuttings I took last month have taken and are doing well. I just stuck a non-flowering piece with a bit of 'heel' into the side of a large pot with gritty compost. I'll have to bring them inside when the weather (finally) turns cold.



Moss carder bee by Alex Potts

