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Bumblebees (Naturalists' Handbooks)



Synopsis

An indispensable guide to identification, ecology and study of bumblebees. This new edition embraces the wealth of information published on bumblebee life history, ecology, foraging, parasites and conservation in recent years. It includes a new chapter on the very real threats to bumblebees; their crucial role as pollinators of our native flora and crops; ways to promote their survival; advantages and problems posed by their commercial use; as well as updated colour plates, keys and distribution maps of all British species (including *Bombus hypnorum*). The book introduces techniques and approaches to original work so that anyone with an interest can usefully contribute to furthering our understanding and appreciation of these wonderful and important insects.

Book Information

Series: Naturalists' Handbooks

Paperback: 144 pages

Publisher: Pelagic Publishing; 3rd Revised & enlarged edition (January 1, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1907807063

ISBN-13: 978-1907807060

Product Dimensions: 5.8 x 0.4 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

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Customer Reviews

The Naturalist Handbook series started in 1983 with Insects on Nettles and my own collection goes up to number 27 Insects on Cherry Trees published in 1999. The first four were published by Cambridge University Press and the rest by Richmond Publishing Company. The title under review was first published in 1987 with a revised edition published in 1991. The new edition has revised and updated the text and reading list as well as including *Bombus hypnorum*, a species new to Britain in 2001. *Bombus cryptorum* has also been added to the list but *B. subterraneus* is now considered to be extinct. So the current British bumblebee fauna is now made up of 24 species (one less than the number recognized in the earlier edition), including the 6 parasitic

Ã¢ ¯ËœcuckooÃ¢ ¯â,¢ bumblebees which had previously been placed in a separate genus *Psithyrus* but are now considered as belonging to the genus *Bombus*. The four plates of beautiful coloured illustrations by Anthony Hopkins have been retained and modified to reflect the small changes in the British list. A very welcome change is that the distribution maps have been increased in size and reproduced in colour, making them considerably easier to study. The book starts with a useful introduction followed by a section on the distribution and recognition of species. There are about 250 species of bumblebees in the world, the majority of which occur in the North Temperate Zone. The authors discuss the significance and often damaging effects of introducing non-native species. The third chapter on the natural history of true bumblebees uses four of the commonest species to illustrate the range of natural history. It is only the queen that survives the winter and she general emerges from hibernation in spring. However, we have a winter-flowering honeysuckle in the garden outside our kitchen window and in December and January we have a very busy bumblebee foraging amongst the flowers. I look forward to studying her more closely and using the excellent keys to identify her! Chapter 4 discusses the nesting habits of bumblebees and the possibility of establishing a captive colony. Chapter 5 deals with the cuckoo bumblebees, parasites, nest associates and predators. Chapter 6 discusses in great detail the foraging behaviour and invites individuals and groups to carry out detailed studies of the occurrence and behaviour of bumblebees. This is followed by a chapter on the threats, conservation and commercial use of bumblebees. Chapter 8 provides detailed advice and keys for the identification of bumblebees and is followed by a chapter on how to study these beautiful creatures. Chapter 10 provides a list of books and references for further reading amongst which is the superb volume 98 of the New Naturalist Library *Bumblebees* by Ted Benton, a beautifully illustrated and detailed account of these fascinating insects. Finally the book is completed with a useful and concise index. This is a beautiful and interesting book which should appeal to the general naturalist as well as the specialist. (Maurice Moss *Zoological Journal of the Linnean Society*) A long while ago there was one book on bumblebees. The original New Naturalist volume by Butler and Free. Then came the first *Bumblebee Mapping Scheme and Bumblebees* by David Alford, together with a flurry of interest in academic circles around the ideas of treating bumblebee colonies as model human societies, typified by *Bumblebee Economics* by Heinrich in the USA. In the UK in the 1970s to 1990s a small group around Sarah (Sally) Corbet, based at Cambridge, produced a number of studies of bumblebee ecology, amongst which was one by Oliver Prys-Jones. This study, together with the background information needed by Prys-Jones to undertake his study (such as a key to bumblebee species), was based closely on the earlier key in Alford, and became the basis for one of the first

volumes of ecological studies in The Cambridge Naturalist series. This series aimed to promote the relatively new discipline of ecology to the wider public and, at the same time, to engage students with possible research topics. As such the first edition of Bumblebees never quite made it into the popular Natural History ratings, although lots of enthusiastic amateurs like myself bought it. I had already bought Alford with its great detail on bumblebee parasitology, but this was of fairly passing interest to one more interested in finding the aculeate Hymenoptera in the field than studies of the inner details of their parasites. I am afraid that I was similarly unimpressed by the descriptions of removing the honey stomach of a bumblebee in order to find the calorific value of its content, which, as I had got the key in its original form in Alford, was my overriding impression of the first edition of the Prys-Jones and Corbet volume. Quite apart from a certain reluctance to ascribe dubious human economic models to wildlife, I didn't have access to the calorimeters required to do such studies myself! Since then much water has flowed under the bridge and bumblebees have again become a very popular group with the wider British public. Finding and naming bumblebees remains a major avenue of interest and there have been a variety of books and web-based resources servicing this need. Unfortunately, bumblebees are fairly readily recognised as such, but are much harder to name to species. Once one has become adjusted to the idea that accurate naming may well involve having a dead specimen with you and looking carefully at it with a hand-lens or microscope, the need for a taxonomic key becomes paramount. Alford, expensive though it was, has long been out of print; let alone the rather cheaper reprint of the keys, provided to participants of the original Bumblebee Mapping Scheme (who has got my copy?): the original Cambridge Naturalist Volume, in both its editions, likewise. A very good key, revised from an earlier Essex-based volume, appeared in the very wide-ranging and readable new book on bumblebees in the New Naturalist series by Ted Benton. Like Alford, this volume was priced rather highly, but nevertheless sold out quickly; a victim of a publishing policy unfortunately predicated on a collectors' market, rather than the New Naturalist's first avowed aim of bringing serious natural history studies to the British public. I was therefore very interested when Oliver and Sally approached the Bees, Wasps and Ants Recording Society (BWARS) about using their data to provide up to date distribution maps for a new edition. After some discussion it was decided to use new date classes for these printed maps, the old 1970 dividing line being somewhat irrelevant in 2010. When my review copy dropped onto the mat it was not just the maps which gained my interest. The book was over twice the thickness of the original edition (my first edition copy also lost to some past student of bumblebees); clearly there was new material here. On reading the book I found myself immediately engaged both by the content, a wide but not over-detailed, review of research which has gone on since the first edition, and the writing

style; age and experience have served both authors well here. Yes, the energy studies are still there, but they are set within a much broader framework than originally. The key provides understanding of how to separate out the more tricky species and adds the new colonist *Bombus hypnorum*. It still requires a dead specimen for separation of the more awkward species but, as mentioned at the start, this is inevitable with this group of insects. So, my verdict: once you have decided to get to grips with the more challenging species, and probably would like a bit more ecological meat, this is a very good and affordable introduction to the next stage. Get out and buy it! (Mike Edwards ED British Journal of Entomology and Natural History) This is the third, substantially revised, edition of a now classic Naturalists Handbook first published 20 years ago. A great deal has happened in the bumblebee world since then, most notably a considerable surge in the popularity of these lovely insects culminating in the formation of a Bumblebee Conservation Trust. Most bumblebees are not prospering, unfortunately, as the great spread of "pre-1990" records on their distribution maps reveals. Against the trend, one species, the striking *Bombus hypnorum*, has colonised England successfully and is now quite common. Like other bumblebees it has an English name, the Tree Bumblebee, but this handbook does not like them and sticks to Latin names throughout. Another species, *Bombus lucorum*, has been shown to be a complex of three closely related species. All these are included in the updated key. This edition has a new chapter on the threats, conservation and commercial use of bumblebees. If anything, it underrates the threats. There is current controversy over whether the new neo-nicotinoid herbicides are inadvertently targeting crop-pollinators, including bumblebees. The response of Defra is to say that there is no proof, while refusing to fund research that might provide it. One of the strengths of this guide is that it encourages the field study of bumblebees and suggests ways of going about it. It is good to see it back again, for a new generation and with a new publisher. By the by, if you are looking for an easy way to identify bumblebees, do get hold of the folded leaflet What's that bumblebee? produced by the Bumblebee Conservation Trust (www.bumblebeeconservation.org). (Peter Marren British Wildlife) The dramatic decline in bumblebee numbers over recent decades means there is no better time to become involved in identifying, recording and researching these enigmatic creatures. Oliver Prys-Jones and Sarah Corbet's book is an ideal starting place for those who wish to find out more about bumblebees from recognising common species to understanding their life cycles. This edition has been updated to include current species information and maps, covering for example the relatively new UK arrival *Bombus hypnorum*, as well as a new chapter on the conservation of bumblebees. The book is written in an extremely accessible style, with handy definitions and interesting illustrations alongside the main text. An identification key is included,

which at first glance might seem a little daunting for a novice, but is accompanied by an excellent glossary diagram and complemented by beautiful colour illustration plates. The chapter "Approaches to Original Work" contains suggestions for further research and will be of interest to students, teachers and enthusiastic amateurs. Descriptions of how to carry out the techniques along with suppliers and web resources are all provided. The threats to bumblebees in the UK are significant and ongoing. This book is an excellent step towards inspiring greater knowledge of the insects and is a valuable contribution to their conservation. (Clare Bugg The Biologist) One of the strengths of this guide is that it encourages the field study of bumblebees and suggests ways of going about it. It is good to see it back again, for a new generation and with a new publisher. (Peter Marren British Wildlife)

Oliver Prys-Jones studied zoology at the University of St. Andrews and furthered a long term interest in bumblebees and their life histories with doctoral and research fellowship studies at the University of Cambridge. He subsequently qualified in medicine at Liverpool University and remains absorbed by bumblebees while working as a medical practitioner in North Wales. Sarah Corbet has taught entomology and ecology in London University and the University of Cambridge. Her research interest is in pollination ecology, with a special focus on bumblebees.

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