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BWARS



### Featuring:

- Background and distribution
- Biology
- Conservation



UK distribution of Great Yellow Bumblebee 1990-2010.



Red Clover *Trifolium pratense* on Machair.

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## Information Sheet

### Great Yellow Bumblebee (*Bombus distinguendus*)

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### Background and Distribution

The Great Yellow Bumblebee (*Bombus distinguendus*) is probably the rarest of all the British bumblebees. Once distributed all over Great Britain, in the past 100 years it has contracted in range to the north and west of Scotland. Its main populations are on the Western Isles, Orkney, Coll & Tiree, and lowland Caithness, with small scattered centres in coastal Sutherland. The decline, particularly evident since 1960, is thought to be linked to increasing intensity of farming and other land use, resulting in a lack of the flowers essential for all bees to thrive. It is no accident that the greatest numbers are in areas of low-intensity crofting, where clovers, vetches and knapweeds are still plentiful.

### Biology

A Great Yellow Bumblebee queen emerges from hibernation in May, and begins to collect pollen to store in an underground nest. It lays eggs, and the larvae develop on the protein-rich pollen store to become 'workers' who provision the nest from then on. At its peak, the nest may contain a few tens of workers. Later in the summer, some eggs develop into males, while others are destined to become the next breeding queens. Once the young queens mate, all the old queens, workers and males die and the new queens hibernate underground.

### Conservation

The Great Yellow is able to collect nectar from the deep flowers of Red Clover and Black Knapweed, two of its favourite food-plants. It will feed from a range of flowers, especially those in the pea, thistle and mint families. Its conservation requires a supply of suitable flowers right through the summer from May to September so that the nests produce the next generation of breeding bees. This usually means limiting grazing and cutting in summer, or practising appropriate rotation. Agricultural support schemes may be available to assist this.

**BWARS, The Bees Wasps & Ants Recording Society** is the national recording scheme which provides the only source of fully validated data on the UK bee, wasp & ant fauna.  
<http://www.bwars.com/>

**The Bumblebee Conservation Trust** is the UK charity focused on the conservation of bumblebees, aiming to prevent further national extinctions, and halt further population declines.  
[www.bumblebeeconservation.org](http://www.bumblebeeconservation.org)  
Registered Charity No. 1115634.

- \* The rarest bumblebee in the UK, confined to the N and W of Scotland
- \* Requires flowers for nectar and pollen from May to September
- \* **What can YOU do to encourage them?**



A queen Great Yellow Bumblebee.



A worker Great Yellow Bumblebee.



A male Great Yellow Bumblebee.

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Photos: Bob Dawson.