



BWARS

Information Sheet

Red Mason-bee (*Osmia bicornis*)

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- * Safe with Children and with Pets
- * Important wild pollinator of fruit trees and many wild plants
- * **Can you add to our knowledge?**

Featuring:

- Background information
- Distribution in UK and the world
- Habitat requirements
- Conservation



UK distribution of *Osmia bicornis*

Background and Distribution

The Red Mason-bee (*Osmia bicornis*) is a very familiar and distinctive spring-flying solitary bee in gardens, parks and allotments.

It is found in towns, cities and villages throughout England, Wales and lowland Scotland as far north as Perthshire (although Scottish records are still rather patchy). The bee is newly introduced into Ireland. Like many common and widespread species, the fine details of its distribution are less well known (or reported).

On continental Europe, the species is equally widespread, but the continental colour form is different to that found in the UK, and is generally darker.

There is a single flight period each year and it is found from late March to early June (occasionally later). Peak activity matches the flowering period of the mass-flowering fruit trees such as Apple and Pear, ie late April to mid-May. The males usually emerge about two weeks before the females.

Osmia bicornis has potential as a managed pollinator of fruit crops.



A pair of *Osmia bicornis*



Female *Osmia* carrying mud back to the nest



Habitat and Conservation

Osmia bicornis nests in a variety of existing aerial cavities, and can easily be coaxed into using cut bamboo stems or stiff cardboard tubing.

The brood cells are constructed in a linear fashion, and the cell partitions and the closing nest plug are made of mud.

The bees forage for pollen at an extremely broad range of flowering plants.

Osmia bicornis can be encouraged by putting out artificial nests sites. These can be grand constructions (like bee hotels) to a collection of cut bamboo stems in a tube.

Ideally, these should be placed in an open position, about 1-2m above the ground in a south facing direction along a wall or fence.



Bee hotel on a house wall. These artificial sites provide many nesting opportunities for cavity nesting bees



Osmia bicornis nests in glass tubes with partitioned cells

Hymettus Ltd is the premier source of advice on the conservation of bees, wasps and ants within Great Britain and Ireland.

<http://hymettus.org.uk/>

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/>

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