

# The Journal

## Nature Notes

Some of our summer visitors can be induced to stay in your garden by providing them with the right food and nesting sites. Three years ago, I planted some Red Valerian and Viper's Buglos in my garden as they are some of the preferred food plants of the Hummingbird Hawkmoth. Finally, after waiting patiently all this time, one turned up at the start of June, spending 10 minutes feeding on the flowers by hovering and manoeuvring its remarkably long proboscis into each flower in turn. These are amongst the most impressive of our garden visitors, especially considering how far they have flown to get here. Although they are thought to occasionally breed in the south of England, most have migrated here from southern Europe or North Africa.



Another attempt that I made to persuade visitors to linger in the garden was to build a bee hotel;



this consisted of a wooden box packed with garden canes of various diameters and blocks of wood with holes drilled in them. Many of our solitary bees readily nest in this sort of insect hotel, with the attractive Red Mason Bee perhaps the commonest. They usually nest in crumbling mortar or holes in cliffs, but they readily adapt to use hollows in artificial nests. Each female occupies a single hole, which she lines with mud and pollen before laying a single egg in a cell that is constructed from chewed leaves. The larvae eat the pollen and pupate in the autumn before hibernating over winter; they emerge in spring to feed on pollen and nectar. Unfortunately, none have taken up residence in my bee hotel. I suspect this is because it is not warm enough, so I will be moving the nest so it is facing south and is free of any overhanging vegetation; that way it will receive maximum sunlight.

One other recent first-time visitor to my garden was a Box Bug. These insects used to be rare, confined to Box Hill in Surrey where they fed on the abundant box trees, but they have been recently spreading over England and they reached Leicestershire in 2014. They feed largely on the fruit of the host plant and have been found on hawthorn, buckthorn, yew and plum trees. Like other true bugs, they have piercing mouthparts, but unlike some of their blood-sucking relations, they feed solely on plant material and are harmless.



I'm sure that many of you will have been watching Springwatch on television recently. One project that they were encouraging, in association with the British Trust for Ornithology, was Gardenwatch which aims to carry out the largest ever audit of British gardens. Our gardens together form the largest nature reserve in the country and by joining in with this project you will be contributing to the knowledge of our wildlife and how it can be further encouraged in your garden. Full details can be found at <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/gardenwatch>.