



Photo: A Morrison, Durness Golf Club

Managing golf courses for bumblebees

Well-designed and well-managed golf courses can conserve wildlife. Golf courses can increase the amount of wildlife compared to previous land uses. Some of our rarest creatures already find a safe haven on golf courses.

From R&A sustainability website

About bumblebees and why they need our help

There are **24 species** of bumblebee in the UK. These familiar insects have suffered serious declines in abundance and distribution.

Eight species, one in three bumblebee species, are considered species of high conservation priority.

These declines are linked to a more intensively-managed countryside, leading to the loss of wildflower-rich grasslands and other habitats. As they are dependent on an abundance and diversity of flowers, bumblebees are excellent indicators of the health of a landscape.

Our rarest and most threatened bumblebee species such as the Shrill carder bee (*Bombus sylvarum*) and the Great Yellow bumblebee, (*Bombus distinguendus*) now have their remaining strongholds in areas which are still flower-rich and often more sensitively managed. Adjustments to management and creation of flower-rich areas can boost local bumblebee populations and encourage them to grow and spread.



Great Yellow bumblebee

Photo: BBCT

Introduction

Golf courses can play a vital role in helping bumblebee populations recover.



Photo: A Dorians, Dundonald Golf Course

Firstly, by creating high-quality, connected habitat to support bumblebees and other pollinators. With over **3,000 golf courses in the UK, contributing to 126,000 ha of greenspace** in predominantly urban environments, golf courses are well placed to provide flower-rich 'stepping stones' across an increasingly fragmented landscape.

Secondly, golf courses **attract millions of people, with an estimated 979,500 adults who play golf twice a month in England alone.** This provides a fantastic opportunity to engage golfers about the plight of bumblebees across the UK. Informative signage near well-managed, flower-rich habitats has the potential to educate members and visitors alike.

The creation of pollinator-friendly habitats need not be expensive. The establishment of flower-rich habitats in long rough and out of play areas, if carefully planned with appropriate advice, can actually save money. A reduction in mowing frequency and use of chemicals would contribute both to the creation of these beneficial areas and other environmental initiatives at your facility.

England Golf predict that through greener practices a typical club could save £30,000 a year.

Furthermore, a golf player survey indicated that about **70% of golfers want to see wildlife on the course** and they want their clubs to have initiatives that are environmentally friendly.

Whether your course is a heathland, parkland or links course, **it has the potential to contribute to the recovery of bumblebee species across the UK.** One study found that golf courses can support more bumblebee species than their surrounding agricultural habitats, even suggesting that golf courses have the potential to have a positive landscape effect on bumblebee populations. Golf courses from Durness to Dungeness have already contributed to bumblebee conservation.

Can you take action to help bumblebees at your course? Read on to find out how.



Where can I help bumblebees on my golf course?

Formal planted areas around the clubhouse, pro-shop and parking areas – plant a range of herbaceous perennials, bulbs, flowering shrubs or a scented herb bed in formal areas around the clubhouse and tees.

Wetland vegetation
Plant native species such as yellow flag iris, purple loosestrife and hemp agrimony on pond edges and damp areas to provide food for bumblebees and habitat for aquatic species.

Wetland fringe
Create transitional habitats to provide a natural feel to the course as well as providing food sources and nesting opportunities for many pollinator species.

Bunkers
Bunker faces and surroundings can provide nesting habitat for many pollinators. Similar habitat is created naturally on links and dune systems.

Sand hazard and rough
North Forelands Golf Club

Semi-rough
A number of wildflowers can be established and encouraged in areas where a shorter sward is required. Sow red and white clovers, birds-foot trefoil and other low-growing legumes as well as selfheal. Reduce mowing frequency from April to once every six weeks to create opportunities for these species to flower. Remove all cuttings.

Long rough and carry areas
Long in-play rough can be good for biodiversity. Try introducing yellow rattle seed, a native annual wildflower and hemiparasite on grasses that can help to reduce their vigour and produce an open sward, encouraging wildflowers to flourish.

To create suitable nesting habitat, leave some areas of longer vegetation and cut areas on a longer rotation (every two – three years) to allow some small grass tussocks to form.

Out of play areas
These areas can be used to establish plant communities that enhance the natural landscape around the course e.g. heathland or chalk grassland. There may be potential for meadow creation to allow wildflowers such as knapweed, wild carrot and scabious to flourish and give a splash of colour between holes.

Wildflowers
Pyecombe Golf Course

Woodland edge
• Allow scrub species and longer vegetation to colonise on woodland edge to create transition habitat and food sources for bumblebees. Scrub species such as bramble, ivy and dog rose are important sources of pollen and nectar. Black horehound and white dead-nettle are common species of woodland edge that are favourite forage plants for a number of scarce bumblebees.

Woodland
• Careful woodland management including, thinning, coppicing and edge and ride management can encourage growth of woodland wildflowers.

Pyecombe Golf Course

Hedgerows
You don't need to cut hedgerows every year. To encourage dense growth and greater flowering and fruiting, manage your hedge network on a three-year cycle, cutting a third of the hedgerows every year. Leave uncut buffer strips of one – two metre width of longer, flowery vegetation along your hedges and around scrub. Plants up gaps in hedgerows with pollinator-friendly species.



The right plants for the right places



Mahonia



Lungwort



Lavender



Cosmos

Planting area

Spring flowering

Early summer flowering

Late summer/ autumn flowering



Formal planting



crocus,
lungwort,
anemone,
pansy,
winter-flowering heather,
bugle,
mahonia,
flowering currant

wallflower,
allium,
bergamot,
thyme,
globe thistle,
lamb's ears, bidens,
sweet alyssum,
catmint

toadflax,
single-flowered dahlias,
viper's bugloss,
Russian sage, salvias,
scabious, Michelmas
daisies, cosmos,
sunflowers,
verbena, sedum

Herb bed



wild garlic,
chives

thyme, marjoram, sage,
lavender, fennel, tansy,
feverfew, borage

rosemary
and fennel

Bulbs



snowdrop,
grape hyacinth, crocus,
snakes-head fritillary

alliums, lily of the valley,
Siberian Iris,
Turk's-Head lilies

autumn flowering crocus
and cyclamen

Wetland



marsh marigold,
bog bean

yellow flag iris,
water lily

water mint

Wetland fringe



cuckoo flower,
ragged robin

marsh cinquefoil,
meadowsweet

purple loosestrife,
marsh woundwort

Hedgerow and Woodland



pussy willow,
crab apple, blackthorn,
flowering currant,
bird cherry, gorse,
white dead-nettle,
red dead-nettle, primrose

dog rose,
foxglove,
honeysuckle

black horehound,
hedge woundwort,
ivy

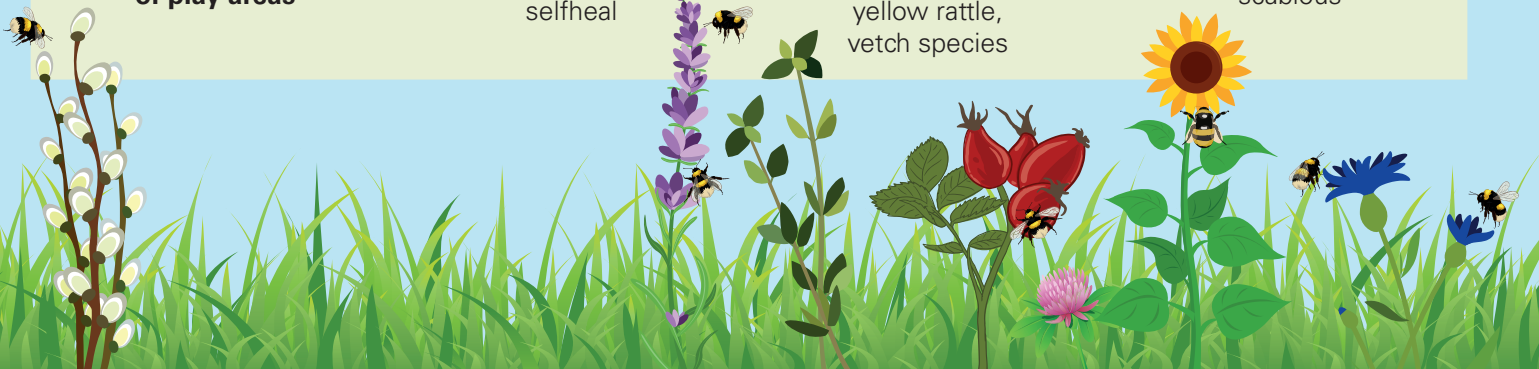
Rough and out of play areas



cowslip,
red campion,
selfheal

red clover,
white clover,
bird's foot trefoil,
yellow rattle,
vetch species

knapweed,
scabious



Tree bumblebee
(*Bombus hypnorum*)
nest in shed



Photo: Clare Flynn



Shrill carder bee queen,
(*Bombus sylvarum*)

Photo: Louise Bradley



Where to get further advice and guidance

Bumblebee Conservation Trust enquiries@

bumblebeeconservation.org

T: 01786 594 128

RSPB Sector Advice

conservation-advice@rspb.org.uk

T: 01767 693308

Factsheets in the series

Bumblebees are **hard-working and versatile pollinators**, and hence provide an important service to agriculture.

They are also key to maintaining biodiversity as so many wild plants depend upon them for pollination. Our series of land management factsheets provides information about a variety of management options for different habitat types.

Further information can be found at **bumblebeeconservation.org**.

What do bumblebees need?

Food. One of the most positive actions you can take for wild pollinators is to provide abundant flowers. Bumblebees need sugary nectar for energy and pollen for protein. They only store food for a few days at a time, so they need nectar and pollen-rich flowers continuously through the entire flight season (February to October). Spring is a critical time as newly emerged queens must build up reserves lost over winter to establish their colony.

Nesting sites should be warm, sheltered and undisturbed. Many bumblebees nest in disused small mammal burrows underground or in long vegetation and grass tussocks. Pockets of suitable nesting habitat should be as close as possible to abundant food resources.

Hibernation sites are often cool and north-facing with loose soft soil, e.g. hedge banks, woodlands, ditch banks, dead wood, or under stones or wood piles. New bumblebee queens burrow down a few inches and excavate a small chamber in which to spend the winter.



Photo: Nikki Gammans

Volunteers planting a herb garden at Lydd Golf Course

Other ways to support bumblebees at your club

- **Choose UK-sourced and grown, native wildflower seed and plants** that compliment existing habitats. A good starting point is to try adjusting management to encourage naturally-occurring wildflowers already present on the course and surrounding areas especially if the course is located in or near flower-rich habitats.

- Think about how to **make use of materials from course management operations**. Create timber piles and sand mounds in sunny areas. Piles of old bunker sand and compost heaps can all provide valuable shelter and nesting opportunities for bumblebees and other pollinators.
- **Create interpretation and information panels** to inform club users of any forthcoming changes to management or place articles in the club newsletters or social media. Communication with players on and off the course is important – celebrate new initiatives and successes, and promote any awards and mentions in the press. This is important for generating support for the aims of creating a more sustainable, nature-friendly course.

- Incorporate **environmental or biodiversity management plans into your existing course management plan** and policies to ensure a shared understanding of the management practices and that wildlife-friendly practice is embedded into normal course management.
- **Encourage local wildlife groups and volunteers to carry out wildlife surveys and monitoring**. This information can help you target your management to any rare or scarce species present and also to assess the impact of your management on local biodiversity. Bumblebee Conservation Trust runs a monitoring scheme for bumblebees. See **www.beewalk.org.uk**



To learn more about bees and how to help them, visit **bumblebeeconservation.org** or **www.rspb.org.uk**

