

Red Mason Bees Nest Houses



© Louise Hislop

Red Mason bees are solitary, aerial nesting bees that fly between April and June and are excellent fruit tree pollinators. Bees transfer nectar and pollen between flowers as they collect it for their nest, plants need pollination to reproduce and develop fruit and seeds.

As part of the Bee Guardian Scheme, we have installed two release boxes and two artificial nest houses mounted on poles in the sunniest part of the Friends' Garden.

In March, we receive cocoons containing live bees, which we place in the release boxes. When the temperature is warm enough the bees hatch from their cocoons and start to fly, feed and mate.



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After mating, a female bee builds a nest, hopefully in one of the cardboard nest tubes, but she may choose crumbling mortar joints in walls, hollow plant stems or even key holes.



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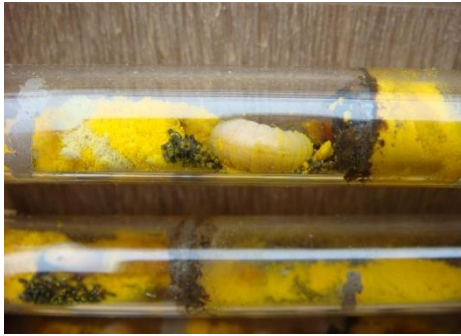
Once she has chosen her nest site the female starts to build a cell using small balls of mud, which she carries back to the nest.

When the cell is ready, she carries in pollen, which has collected on hairs on her body when she visited flowers to feed on their nectar. She brushes off the pollen in the cell and lays an egg on top of it then seals the cell with more mud.

Gradually she fills the tube with more cells, when the last cell is complete she leaves a small gap then adds a thicker mud wall to seal the cavity and help prevent predation of the eggs and larvae.



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When the eggs hatch the larvae start to feed on the pollen and nectar in their cells.



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Once they have consumed all the food they spin a cocoon and enter the pupal stage.

The pupae develop into adult bees during the autumn and the bees overwinter in their cocoons until the following spring.

In September we return the full nest tubes to the Bee Guardian Scheme so that the cocoons can be kept in an ideal environment during the winter. In the following March we receive new cocoons and the cycle starts again.



© Deborah Kinloch

You can also find our friendly willow bee in the pollinator bed.



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Acknowledgements:

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All photographs Louise Hislop from BWARS site. (except full nest tubes, Deborah Kinloch)

