

# MASON BEES UK

## GUARDIAN NEWSLETTER

**\*\* SUMMER 2017 \*\***



Photo: Pete Deans

### FIELD UPDATE

This year, our mason bees are working in cherry, plum, apple and pear orchards to pollinate fruit, either alone or in tandem with honey and/or bumble bees.

Chris Whittles, our Managing Director and Man-In-The-Field gives us an insight into his summer in the orchards....

**MARCH:** We started putting out bees in the pear and plum orchards at the end of March, this was followed almost immediately by the cherries. These trees had come into flower slightly earlier than expected, but then took a long time to develop. The daytime temperature at this time was good but the nights were very cold. In late March, we also started to put out bees into the covered cherries.



We released them gradually over a two-week period, stopping when the last trees were coming into flower.

**APRIL:** In the middle of April, the apple trees were starting to flower - two weeks earlier than normal - so we released bees into the apples early to coincide with the blossom. However, mason bee activity

was then hindered as daytime temperature rarely got above 12°C and the nights were still very cold. We observed bees huddling together in the release

boxes to keep warm, (right). I had never seen anything like this before! The bees had emerged



successfully and were surviving, but they certainly weren't flying.

**MAY:** It is difficult to know yet how much pollination has occurred this year by any bee species. In early May, some of the honey bee colonies were being removed from the orchards because it was so cold; there was no food for them left in the hives and the bees were starving. Where bumblebees were placed in the orchards as well, I rarely saw one flying. In the West Midlands we had frosts. In some places, this wiped out apple crops completely. We have seen substantial damage in many orchards and it is estimated that the best crops this year are only going to produce 70% of a normal yield. Wet weather again occurred at the end of May, a trend of the last five years or so. Persistent rain at this time can effectively end the mason bee season, which would be a terrible disappointment.

**JUNE:** Much to my surprise and delight, the rain did not last that long - only about seven days and then it really warmed up. When I say 'really' - it warmed up to England's second warmest June on record! With the hot weather following the rain, conditions became ideal for the bees - the question was, had

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they survived long enough to make use of it?

I was relieved when we started getting reports stating that the bees were finally flying. Requests for more Nesting Tubes followed as the bees were successfully filling up their nesting sites. I felt tremendously relieved and confident that our new over-wintering protocol is producing strong, resilient bees. We cannot be totally certain of the results until we start opening tubes, but I'm looking forward to September much more now at the end of June than I was at the end of May!

### GUARDIAN FEEDBACK

We hope you have had a positive experience with your bees this season. Like Chris' experience in the field, many Guardians have reported that their bees were very slow to emerge, some staying in the cocoons until the middle of May. Where cocoons were being incubated, bees emerged successfully but took shelter in the Nesting Tubes to wait for the air temperature to increase. Thankfully it did, and with the hot weather, reports of nesting activity started coming in.

We are looking forward to receiving your filled tubes and hearing any comments that you wish to make. Opening date for tube submissions is **15<sup>th</sup> August 2017**. Send tubes to:

**MASONBEES UK**  
FREEPOST RTEK - CCET - YREH  
5 MELROSE DRIVE  
SHREWBURY, SY2 6QS

When sending in your tubes, *please only send in the filled or partially filled inner tubes* - keep your outer tubes and re-use them next season. We will send you replacement inner tubes and new cocoons in return. Please mark the package with your name and post code.

No tubes to send back? If you have nothing to send us but would still like to be part of the scheme in 2018, please let us know by emailing us at [contact@masonbees.co.uk](mailto:contact@masonbees.co.uk)

### NEW FINDINGS

We say it every newsletter, but we clearly still have a lot to learn about these wonderful bees! We have continued our trials on nesting tube diameter and length. This year we trialled a 10mm diameter tube, (designed for *Osmia cornuta*, a Spanish bee not found in the UK), and so far, none have been found occupied. We are also seeing that in terms of length, where the bees have a choice, they prefer nesting in longer tubes.

In open orchards, such as pear or apple orchards where there is a lot of exposure to the elements, we have been looking at putting small tubes in longer nest tube holders, i.e. 165mm tubes in 250mm holders and 260mm tubes in 330mm holders. We believe that increased shelter will encourage more nesting activity! Early results are supporting this theory but we will have to wait until September before confirming our findings.

### SIZING CHANGES

Our latest Nesting Tube, coming in at 295mm long, has proved very successful in field trials and is now available for purchase from our online store. You may have noticed that we have altered our sizing scheme across our product range to accommodate this new tube - please note that 'Small' is the old 'Standard' size and 'Medium' is our old 'Giant' size.

### LEAFCUTTER BEES

If you find nesting tubes that are capped with leaves rather than mud, please keep these at home - they are wild leafcutter bees! Please refer to the guidance notes in the FAQ section of our website for info on what to do next

