

FIT and POMS

This year I have been taking part in a survey called the “Flower - Insect Timed Count”, shortened to FIT. The survey is organised by POMS (UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme) and they are trying to accumulate data on pollinating insects so that changes can be tracked. Bear with me because it gets more interesting!

The survey is very easy to do – I just have to spend 10 minutes staring at a patch of a flowers within a 50cm square, and identifying as best I can all the insects which land on the flowers. The main thing this has taught me is that identifying insects is not very easy! Luckily I do not have to identify the exact species, just the category e.g. bumble bee, honey bee, solitary bee, wasp, beetle, fly, butterfly etc.



My 50x50cm quadrat on a patch of sedum

I have learnt a lot – for example, I have found out that whilst most hoverflies are the usual kinds of things – rather flat and stripy and brightly-coloured, there are some that are quite different – one looks like a fly, and one looks very like a bee. Bumble-bees are easy. Flies are easy – usually. But bees are not – the solitary bees are varied in size and can look very like other things such as wasps and sawflies. The size of the eyes and antennae are critical. Luckily there is a category called “Unidentified insect” and there are whole host of little black creatures about 1cm long which have gone into this category.

I have so far done 19 of these little surveys through the summer, on different flowers such as bramble, knapweed, hemp agrimony, marjoram and sedum. The surveys are very pleasant to do and quite entertaining and in the 10 minute period I can see between 2 and 18 insects on my patch of flowers. The most recent one on knapweed in the wild part of the front garden was delightful – I was surrounded by plentiful insects, including butterflies such as Painted Ladies, all probing deeply into the knapweed flowerheads all around me. I broke my previous record on this patch of knapweed with 9 bumble bee visits and 8 honey bee visits plus one solitary bee and one hoverfly. Of course there is no way of knowing if a bee makes a return visit so there may not have been 8 actual honey bees involved!

However, there are a few mysteries. In the last couple of weeks I have started to see good numbers of honeybees – where are they from? We do not have any hives near here, so are they from a wild nest? Conversely, we have a wasps nest in the garden – it is in an old vole hole in the ground and wasps continually go in an out – yet I have never seen a wasp during this survey and indeed we have not see any at all in the garden apart from near the nest.

Although summer is drawing to a close there will be few more surveys yet - the Michaelmas daisies will be in flower soon!

Rosemary Royle