



## South West Bees Project–summary report

Bees, butterflies, hoverflies and other pollinating insects have experienced varying levels of decline in recent years, both in the UK and across Europe. These insects are vital to pollinating our crops and the wildflowers in our countryside - it is estimated that 84% of EU crops (valued annually at £12.6 billion) and 80% of wildflowers rely on insect pollination.

Wild bees and other insect pollinators are faced with a perfect storm of pressures which have all led to their decline. These include a loss of wildflower-rich natural and semi-natural habitats through the intensification of farming, increased use of pesticides, the loss of bee habitats to development, unpredictable and extreme weather resulting from climate change.

The result is that, at a national level, half of our 24 bumblebee species are in decline, two-thirds of our moths and over 70% of our butterflies are in long-term decline.

The South West is of national importance for bees, due to the unique conditions resulting from a combination of climate and great diversity of habitats. The region is home to nationally rare and threatened species, and for some, the South West supports a national stronghold or the last known population in the UK.

The South West peninsula has extensive coastlines featuring coastal cliffs, sand dunes and other coastal habitats which are extremely important habitats for some bee species, as well as for many other insects. The region also has extensive grasslands, heaths and moorland, which at a landscape scale result in habitat mosaics unique to the South West.

Areas of particular note for our threatened bees are Bodmin Moor, the North Cornish coast and the Lizard Peninsular (Cornwall), The South Devon Coast, Dartmoor and Exmoor (Devon), the Dorset heaths and chalk grasslands, the Forest of Dean and parts of the Severn River valley (Gloucestershire), the Somerset Levels and Mendip Hills (Somerset), and Salisbury Plain (Wiltshire).

The South West Bees Project report is the first time that the status of threatened bees has been assessed at a regional level. Whilst we know that the species assessed have declined at a national level, no previous assessment has been made at the finer scale of region and county. National assessments can obscure trends at more local scales as can be seen from the results of our analysis.

The South West remains a national stronghold for the Long-horned mining bee (*Eucera longicornis*), particularly on soft cliffs in South Devon and Dorset. The Six-banded nomad bee (*Nomada sexfasciata*) is a cuckoo bee which uses the Long-horned mining bee as its host - this species is now only found on a single site in South Devon.



The South West Bees Project has looked at 23 bee species considered to be at risk in the UK, and are present in the region. We examined the status of these species of conservation concern using data collated by the Bees Wasps and Ants Recording Society (BWARS). Our analysis has revealed alarming local species losses in the South West at a region and county level.

County	Number of target bee species historically present	Number of target bee species with recent records	Number of target bee species lost
Cornwall & Isles of Scilly	19	11	8 (42%)
Devon	19	13	6 (31%)
Dorset	20	13	7 (35%)
Somerset	17	11	6 (35%)
Bristol & Avon	8	2	6 (75%)
Wiltshire	14	14	0 (0%)
Gloucestershire	7	3	4 (57%)

Of the 23 bees assessed, three are thought to be extinct in South West England. These include the Great yellow bumblebee (*Bombus distinguendus*) which has been lost despite being previously recorded across the region in Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Somerset, Avon and Gloucestershire.

Whilst the remaining 20 bees are still present in the region, at a county level there have been worrying losses, only Wiltshire still retains all of its 14 bees of conservation concern. Bristol and Avon only has recent records of two of these species (of a historic total of eight); Cornwall and Gloucestershire have lost around half of their species, and around a third lost in Devon, Dorset and Somerset.



Many bee species are still present in the South West but have been lost from much of their range, for example the Large garden bumblebee (*Bombus ruderatus*) which has been lost in the last 50 years from Cornwall, Devon and Dorset, but is still present in Gloucestershire, and Wiltshire – where large a large population remains on Salisbury Plain.

Whilst we know that these species have declined at a national level, by looking more closely at the region and counties an even sharper decline is revealed. Over the past 50 years we have seen the local extinction of many of the South West's special bee species.

Our hope is that by highlighting these losses we can raise awareness of the importance of the South West in conserving our declining bee species. Our report highlights conservation actions for the species and for groups of species that share the same habitats – for example ten of the species are found on coastal cliffs in Devon and Dorset.

Buglife have recently launched a Get Britain Buzzing [Pollinator Manifesto](#), a seven point plan to protect bees and other pollinating insects. The declines in our pollinators can be reversed by recreating lost flower-rich habitats and connecting up those that remain, helping bees, butterflies, hoverflies and other wildlife move through our landscape. Our [B-Lines](#) projects will do exactly that by creating and restoring permanent wildflower-rich habitat, as 'stepping stones' or continuous strips of habitat. We will be launching new B-Lines projects in the South West in the near future in collaboration with other local partner organisations.

With a combination of targeted species conservation action and a more general approach to improving the condition of our countryside for bees and other pollinating insects we hope that we can reverse the severe declines highlighted in this report. But Buglife cannot do this alone, and we call on others in the region to work with us to **get the South West buzzing!**

The full [South West Bees project report](#) is available as a download from the Buglife website.

Our thanks to the [Bees Wasps and Ants Recording Society](#) for providing the data, on which our report is based, and to the [Bumblebee Conservation Trust](#) for data and advice. Images © Steven Falk.

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