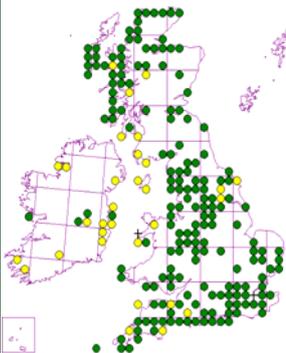




BWARS

Featuring:

- Background information
- Nesting
- How to recognize them
- Are they a problem?



Map showing UK distribution of *Colletes succinctus*.. More data is required to improve the map.



Mating ball.



Males nectaring on a Field Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*).

Information Sheet

The Common Colletes (*Colletes succinctus*)

Murdo Macdonald

Background

One of our most spectacular solitary bees is the mining bee *Colletes succinctus*. It can surprise people that a 'solitary' bee can live in huge colonies or 'aggregations', but the term 'solitary' refers to the fact that the bees live as individuals and have no workers. The 'social' bees have large nests containing one queen attended by non-breeding workers. The *Colletes* lives a bit like Rooks or seabirds - many individuals congregate independently to breed in particularly suitable places.

Nesting

Solitary bees require warmth to be active and breed. The *Colletes*, like all mining bees, nests underground. Nests are dug into south-facing bare or thinly-vegetated earth banks which are warmed by the sun. Sometimes there are many thousands of nests in a small area, the entrances a few cm apart. The females dig the burrow, and stock it with pollen collected from heaths *Calluna* and *Erica*. The egg is laid on the pollen mass, and the larva develops to emerge as an adult a year later.

How to recognize them

The *Colletes* is a very smart-looking bee, a little smaller than a honeybee with a rich brown thorax and clean white bands across its abdomen. Many other insects look quite similar, but a nesting aggregation of *Colletes* on a sunny day in August is a very spectacular sight. The ground can appear to be covered in a humming moving carpet as hundreds of bees go about their business. Females will be moving to and from their nests delivering pollen, while males will patrol the area for the chance to mate. Often little clumps of bees - several males surrounding one female - will form and roll around on the ground, or down slopes, until one male wins the prize.

Are they a problem?

Definitely not! The sight of large numbers of bees can unnerve people, but *Colletes* are not aggressive and are too weak to sting people. If you find an active aggregation, enjoy the experience. They will only be at peak activity for a few weeks in July and August - for most of the year they are not active. If you have an aggregation on your land, avoid letting the vegetation grow too rank, so that the soil remains open to the sun.

- * One of the most spectacular of our solitary bees.
- * Often living in huge colonies (aggregations).
- * Reliant on the pollen of heathers.
- * **If you find them, enjoy the sight and encourage them to stay.**



Colletes succinctus female foraging for pollen at Heather



Colletes succinctus males nectaring at Heather. (*Calluna vulgaris*) flowers.



Classic *Colletes succinctus* habitat in the North York Moors.

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BWARS, The Bees Wasps & Ants Recording Society is the national recording scheme which provides the only source of fully validated data on the UK bee, wasp & ant fauna.

<http://www.bwars.com/>

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