
New records for the red mason bee *Osmia rufa* (Hymenoptera: Apidae) in the west of Scotland.

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According to the latest British atlas, the red mason bee *Osmia rufa* is widely distributed and common throughout much of mainland Britain. Whilst it is found as far north as Fife; it is generally regarded as rare in Scotland and parts of northern England (Else & Roberts, 1998). The few publicly available Scottish records are for the east of the country. It is included in the Scottish Biodiversity List because it is categorised as present in 5 or fewer 10km squares in Scotland (www.biodiversityscotland.gov.uk, 2008); the additional records, detailed below, call its inclusion on this list into question.

The red mason bees are thought to have been active in the west of Scotland since at least spring 2006. A local beekeeper phoned Glasgow Museums for advice on bees nesting in the mortar of a sandstone house in the city. This is a classic nesting site for these kinds of bee, and the source of their common name. His description matched that of red mason bees, but no samples were submitted. One nesting site was in the south west of the city, in Dumbreck (NS5663). This site had a large number of bees nesting along the gable and south wall of the house; a second was in the north east, in Springboig (NS6564) on a south-facing gable (Charles Irwin pers. comm.).

Its presence in the west of Scotland was confirmed following an enquiry from Keith Futter of the Glasgow Naturalist History Society on 7 April 2007; who submitted a number of excellent digital images to Glasgow Museums for identification (see Fig. 1. for an example). The characteristic dense ginger hairs on the body and the horn-like projections on the face of the female were clearly visible in one photograph (www.bwars.com). The bees were living in the mortar of his house in Dumbarton (NS386752). No other nests were found in the area until the next spring. At the beginning of May 2008, images of a solitary bees' nest were submitted by Countryside Rangers at Pollok Country Park for identification. These bees were nesting in a south-facing wall and on a wooden post in the stable yard of Pollok Country Park, Glasgow (NS550615). The mud that they collect to form their nest structures was clearly visible on the wooden post. Red mason bees are known to exploit holes in dead wood as well as masonry to rear their young, and they are one of only two British *Osmia* species to use mud

in their nest construction (Else & Roberts, 1998). A male was subsequently collected on 7 May 2008 and the identification confirmed. This specimen has been retained for Glasgow Museums' collection (registered number: Z.2008.26).



Fig. 1. *Osmia rufa* in Dumbarton, 2007 courtesy of Susan Futter.

It is likely that red mason bees are currently quite widespread in central Scotland. They are now confirmed to be present between Dumbarton in the west, West Lothian in the east, and north up to Kinnaird, Angus (National Biodiversity Network 2008). There are no records yet from Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway or the Borders (Murdo Macdonald pers. comm.). Given that the bees are found to the north and south of these counties, and the widespread availability of suitable habitat it is likely that the current distribution reflects a lack of recorders rather than a disrupted distribution. Red mason bees have been growing in popularity as commercial pollinators of gardens and orchards, so any range extension could be assisted by man (Paxton, 2005).

This would help explain a discontinuous distribution, if one does exist. By offering simple nests one can encourage these bees to occupy an allotment or garden. The bees will offer valuable pollination services once established. Nests are available commercially, but it is easy and relatively cheap to make your own. The bees prefer holes in wood or hollow reed stems (i.e. *Phragmites*) to nest in (Wilkaniec & Giejdasz, 2003). The author would be interested to hear of further suspected sightings of red mason bees in Scotland, particularly in the west.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With thanks to Murdo Macdonald for his consultation, the late Keith Futter for his enquiry and his wife Susan for her superb photographs, Lindsay Gemmell for a pristine specimen and Charles Irwin for his excellent memory.

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NBN (National Biodiversity Network) Gateway – Grid map of records on the Gateway for Red Mason Bee (*Osmia (Osmia) rufa*) available at <http://data.nbn.org.uk/gridMap/gridMap.jsp?allIDs=1&srchSpKey=NHMSYS0000876504> (Accessed 17th November 2008) The Scottish Biodiversity List - Species & Habitat Detail – *Osmia rufa* available

http://www.biodiversityscotland.gov.uk/sbl_detail.php?id=39&type=2&navID=9&pageref=sbl_detail&tvk=NBNSYS0000009762 (Accessed 17th November 2008)