



MEETINGS HELD AT
THE RHS GARDEN
HARLOW CARR
CRAG LANE, HARROGATE
HG3 1QB

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NEWSLETTER

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EDITORIAL

It seems there is more trouble with bees. Not the honey bee this time but the mason bee. Last spring, many people (including me) found that their over-wintered bee tubes were spewing out pupae of the parasitic fly *Cacoxenus indagator*. This fly lays its eggs in the bee tubes, they hatch before the bee eggs and eat the stored pollen; the bee larvae then starve to death.

With hindsight this was entirely predictable. In the "wild", mason bees nest in hollow plant stems, beetle borings in wood and similar holes. The individual sites will be scattered and the flies will have to search for them; many will escape the flies' attention. The artificial bee nests concentrate many tubes together; result - bonanza for the flies!

In effect one is creating a monoculture of bee nests and this has the same drawback that all monocultures have - easy spread of pests and diseases. It applies equally to high stocking densities of animals and large fields of one crop. Work some years ago on the behaviour of butterflies (cabbage whites in this instance) showed that females only laid eggs if there were enough plants (or leaves) clustered together to feed their caterpillars until pupation (which explains why my small nettle patch never has the voracious *Vanessid* butterfly caterpillars on it). The insects flip-flop around, landing here and there and unless they repeatedly land on their larval food plant in their search area, they conclude there isn't enough of it and flutter off elsewhere. A good reason for not concentrating any crop in one area of the garden.

Diana Davis

