



Bee Quest

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A hunt for the most elusive bees leads Dave Goulson from the Salisbury plains to the Sussex hedgerows, from Poland to Patagonia. Whether he is tracking great yellow bumblebees in the Hebrides or chasing orchid bees through the Ecuadorian jungle, Dave Goulson's wit, humour and deep love of nature make him the ideal travelling companion.

This utterly charming book will also inspire you to think about the ways in which we are all responsible for the future of our world. Through his scientific expertise and passion for conservation, Goulson shows us nature's resilience against the odds, and that beauty hides in the most surprising places.

Bee Quest Details

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From Reader Review Bee Quest for online ebook

Rebecca says

Goulson grows more like Bill Bryson and Gerald Durrell with each book. You could hardly find better mentors for writing travel/nature narratives, after all. Although the topic of this third book is probably of the least personal interest to me, there are plenty of wonderful asides and pieces of trivia that make it worth journeying along with him everywhere from Poland to Ecuador in the search for rare bees.

For as close-up as his view often is, he also sees the big picture of environmental degradation and species loss. I learned some fairly dismaying facts: gold mining is extremely destructive to the environment, producing 20 tons of toxic material per ring; and it takes five liters of water to produce one almond in California. As for a more hopeful statistic: the billions of dollars it would take to set up conservation efforts for all of the world's struggling species would still only equate to cutting world Coke consumption by 20%. It's all a matter of priorities.

A few favorite lines:

On my way back I was vomited on by a young fulmar, not an experience I would choose to repeat but worth doing once just for the novelty.

We should not ask what nature does for us, but instead ask what we can do for it.

As is often the case in entomology, in the end it all comes down to the genitals.

dreich is a Scottish colloquialism for damp, drizzly, cold and miserable weather. It is a useful term to describe the Scottish weather through much of the autumn, winter and spring, and often comes in handy in the summer too.

Karen says

I enjoyed reading this book and learning about the habitats of the various places visited from the Machair in the Hebrides to the churned up Salisbury Plain to the neglected brown field sites of the Thames, rewilding in Sussex then the more exotic places in S. America such as Patagonia and Ecuador. It would have been great to see some pictures of the shrill carder, dahlbomii and Franklin's etc. I don't think I learned much about their biology and behaviour. Some things really grab you like pigs on the loose mean no bluebells, half a lynx to be top predator over 3500 acres, £40 Billion to save habitats, churned up land is good. Neglect is good appreciate and discover with curiosity what is there. It's interesting to note how much the Government is putting in to protecting habitats but at the same time the dismal lack of forest in this country.

Bill Leach says

Goulson writes of some of his adventures in the search of bumblebees, touching on various factors affecting their diversity.

A major theme in the book is the threat to bees of modern agriculture, largely because it develops into large mono-cultures that cover the land virtually completely. Little marginal space is left for plant variety. In the case of the bees, no wildflowers or arable weeds are present. The contrast is found when he visits Poland where traditional agriculture is still strong, and numerous varieties of bee are found. An interesting item is that the use of avermectin de-worming agent in cattle causes the cowpats to become somewhat poisonous to dung beetles.

It is almost ironic that such agricultural areas cannot support significant bee populations, but they need to be imported for pollination. The author gives the example of the Californian almond industry which must import 85 percent of all the commercial hives in the U.S. - 1.7 million hives of 80 billion bees - to pollinate 2.5 trillion almond flowers.

Gause's Law states that two species that use exactly the same resources cannot co-exist. In the 1970's Graham Pyke visited numerous mountains and found that in the meadows only three to four species of bumblebee were found, generally divisible into short, medium and long-tongued species that fed on different flower species. In the Gorce mountains of Poland, the author found up to fifteen species co-existing, apparently being more specific in their flower visitation than simply the short / medium / long differentiation.

One of the most impressive bumblebees is the Giant Golden (*Bombax dahlbomii*) of Patagonia as it is large (up to 40 mm) and is a golden color. Unfortunately, it is in decline. Research points to disease transferred from other species of imported bumblebee.

One of the author's travels was to the Santa Lucia Cloud Forest Reserve, an appealing location with a large diversity of flora and fauna.

Brownfields - industrial areas that have fallen into disuse - are the subject of one chapter, as they can at times become surprisingly diverse and support a variety species out of proportion to their size. Re-development causes the loss of this variety. The author points out the uselessness of relocating endangered species as the release area in most cases is probably supporting the maximum population of that species.

Re-wilding is the subject of a chapter on the Knepp Castle in England. The estate had been used for agriculture, but has been allowed to return to the wild, but with the introduction of large herbivores including fallow deer, Exmoor ponies and old English longhorn cattle. Limitations of the project include a lack of large predators, and the need to manually control invasive plants such as hawthorn and birch. The net result has been a huge increase in diversity. An issue is what is "wild", as the country was quite different hundreds of years ago when England was largely forest.

Rik says

A really well written look at the state of the environment and the UK and various other countries around the world. I say 'the environment' as Dave Goulson, whilst his primary interest is bees, has an obvious interest in all wildlife, making this a fairly expansive view. The occasional bee fact or detail by no means overwhelms the general narrative, as Dave manages to intersperse it with excellent humour, and great story telling. The general plight of insects etc. covered in the book does make for pretty depressing reading, though Dave tries to make up for it with some positive tales and suggestions too.

Ginni says

The third of Goulson's books that I've read, and as enjoyable as the first two. He is the Professor of Biological Sciences at the University of Sussex, and has spent the last twenty years studying bumblebees. Yet he writes in an easy, readable style; although his writing is backed by immense scientific knowledge and research, it is not dry or dusty. He has a wry sense of humour and is not self important. In this book, he travels widely, both in the U.K. and Europe, and to more exotic destinations like Patagonia and Ecuador, to search for rare and elusive bumblebees. The theme throughout is the threat posed to the natural world by humankind's actions, but although Goulson is passionate in his defence of nature, and his condemnation of the idiocies committed against it, this is not just a diatribe against the destruction of the natural world. It is delightfully written yet with an underlying serious theme; we destroy nature at our own peril, especially pollinators, who we rely on for our sustenance and future existence.

Rebecca says

I read the majority of this book while I was away in the wild for a long weekend and I have to say that made the whole experience even better. I was definitely keeping more of an eye out for bees and other insects than I would normally. I have loved reading every one of Dave Goulson's books and this one was no exception. It's fascinating and fun at the same time. Definitely a book that I will be recommending to people.

Tanja Berg says

This is a wonderful little book on Dave Goulson's favorite subject: bumblebees. Dave is fantastically knowledgeable and also incredibly funny. Some of the subject matter here is quite sad, so it's a relief that it's lightened up along the way.

Dave is on the hunt for rare bumblebees. He discusses habitat losses and habitat finds in the UK. There are some surprising places left to wildlife still, although not many.

In South America, Dave looks for a large golden bumblebee. Sadly, the South American bee populations are collapsing - probably as a result of imported commercial bumble bees from Europe. In the United States there are similar trends, although here it's only the diseases and not the bees themselves who have crossed the Atlantic.

The first book I read by Dave - "A buzz in the meadow" - inspired me to cultivate for bees. I love flowers. The ones on the terrace are now selected for being popular with the local bumblebees. I also have a patch of land that is so slanted that I can't use it for anything. For years I've cut it down. This year, I'm cutting it once - in August. Miraculously - or so it feels - I now have a little meadow (50 * 6 meters or so) that buzzes with life and is abundant in wild flowers.

So do read Dave Goulson and figure out what you can do to support wildlife. I can't do much, but I can feed bumblebees.

Tanneke Burggraaff says

David Goulson neemt de lezer in dit boek mee in zijn zoektocht naar hommels. Hij bezoekt daarbij verschillende plaatsen over de hele wereld. Onder andere Engeland, Polen, Argentinië, Californië en Ecuador. Het boek is ingedeeld in een zeer uitgebreide proloog waarin de auteur beschrijft hoe belangrijk het is om in je jeugd de kans te krijgen de natuur te ontdekken. Iets waar hij de kans voor heeft gekregen en waar zijn liefde voor de hommel door ontstaan is.

Vervolgens bevat het boek 8 hoofdstukken. Elk hoofdstuk bevat een deel van de zoektocht. Van dorre bloemloze tot prachtige bloemrijke gebieden. Op zoek naar hommels. Hij gaat op zoek naar de redenen van het dreigende uitsterven van bepaalde soorten. De ontdekkingen, maar ook de vragen die daarbij oprijzen laten de lezer zien hoe groot het belang is van aanwezigheid van verschillende soorten bloemen en wat de risico's zijn van het bewust verplaatsen van hommels naar andere streken. De fijne manier van schrijven, wat ook nog eens met een dun laagje humor overgoten is, maakt dit boek tot een mooi document voor liefhebbers van de natuur. Het boek is leerzaam, opent de ogen voor de afhankelijkheid van de voedselvoorziening van onder andere hommels. Bovendien laat David Goulson de lezer ook wel duidelijk worden dat determinatie van hommels niet eenvoudig is en dat er enorm veel variaties zijn en verschillende soorten bloemen nodig hebben. De variaties worden soms uitgebreid beschreven, waarbij de auteur zich bij voorbaat al verontschuldigt voor de soms verregaande omschrijving. Het wordt hem vergeven. Uiteindelijk is dat ook zijn vak.

Een opvallend gedeelte in dit boek was het watertekort bij de amandelteelt. Het onttrekken van bodemwater en daardoor de enorme inklinking van de grond. Bijzonderheden waardoor je aan het denken wordt gezet. In de epiloog die kort maar krachtig is verwoord David Goulson heel duidelijk wat er gedaan kan worden om er voor te zorgen dat de hommels recht van bestaan hebben. En dat niet alleen, hij doet suggesties die de leefomgeving van iedereen een stukje mooier zou kunnen maken.

Heel bijzonder om te lezen, zeker als je als lezer al bewust bezig bent met bloemenranden aan te leggen op boerenerven en percelen en probeert met elkaar bewust ervoor te zorgen dat de insecten in je leefomgeving voedsel kunnen vinden.

De vlucht van de hommel is een ontdekkingsreis over het belang van de biodiversiteit.

Dit boek mocht ik als manuscript lezen voor De Club van Echte Lezers. Dank hiervoor.

Genetic Cuckoo says

Disclaimer: I was provided with a free copy of this book in exchange for an honest review

What a simply wonderful and beautiful book! It is such a beautiful book, the simple colours and high quality feel made it a real treat to hold and read.

The story is wonderful and compelling. Dave travels all over the world in search of fascinating insects and keen to understand their habitat and why in many regions they are declining and how best to conserve them. When you read this book you feel you go on an adventure with Dave and his passion is contagious. I now look at insects differently and would love to go hunting for them and find more ways to encourage them in our local environment. I find myself compelled to visit the places he describes.

This book would be a beautiful gift for anyone interested in bees or nature, and this would be a delight for anyone's bookshelf.

Margaret says

An excellent book on one man's quest to find rare and endangered bumblebees.

Like all natural history books, it's both heart warming and heart breaking.

Dave Goulson writes with a charm and quirky sense of humour that makes this book a sheer delight to read. A word of advice: read the footnotes. You must read the footnotes. Nine tenths of the quirky sense of humour appears in the footnotes.

As well as being entertaining I learned a lot about bumblebees. Including how they came to be in New Zealand. I always adored bumblebees. They always seemed to me to be earnest, flying teddy bears. All fat and furry, bumping from flower to flower. Winnie-the-Pooh with wings and stripes!

This book has simply cemented my affection for the creatures.

Paul says

There is nothing better than sitting in the garden in summer sun with a glass of something cold, watching the bees buzz between flowers. The honey bee moves quickly collecting nectar, and then there are the bumble bees. They look like they shouldn't be able to fly as they float lazily between the flowers. I thought that there were only one or two species of bumble bee, but it turns out there are many more than that. The question is how many are left, and how many could self-confessed insect nut, Dave Goulson, find?

Goulson begins at Salisbury Plain, a large patch of chalk downland in the south-west, which thanks to the British army, has remained untouched from modern industrial farming methods. Provided you remember to avoid the unexploded ordinance, this is one of the best places to find the shrill carder and other rarer bumble bees as well as many other invertebrates, pond shrimps and the fantastically named Great Bustard. The promise of finding a Yellow Armpit bee in Eastern Europe prompts a trip to Poland. The tiny island of Barra is surrounded by crystal clear blue seas and startlingly white beaches; the look is Caribbean, but as this is just off the west coast of Scotland, the temperatures didn't really match, but this is where the Great Yellow is still left.

Trips further afield to Patagonia, Ecuador and California in search of orchid bees, the Franklin and Giant Golden add a touch of exotica to the search for the rear and unusual before Goulson is brought back to earth with two visits to a brownfield site on the Thames estuary, one official, and another that was, er, less official shall we say. Really enjoyed reading about the re-wilding of Knepp Castle. The changes that Sir Charles Burrell has made to his estate have been as dramatic as they have been beneficial for the local environment.

Goulson has written his best book yet, his writing keeps getting better and his Infectious enthusiasm for his furry subjects is catching. Not only is it a wonderful read, but it is a prescient warning of our meddling with the environment. Drenching the land in insecticides is fundamentally wrong; in California, Goulson saw that a small amount of land set aside for nature could actually improve yields, with none of the detrimental effects of chemical addition. Honeybees are thought to be the biggest pollinators, but it was found that bumble bees are equally good, you wouldn't have tomatoes for example. If you are a fan of natural history book then this is a necessary addition. Only two minor flaws, it could have done with some photos, and it

wasn't long enough!

Ryan Wait says

A very interesting and enjoyable piece of nature writing. The author has a very engaging style which makes this book easily readable and not at all dry, despite clearly being well backed by the scientific literature.

The book documents the author's travels as he seeks out various rare bee species. Many of these stories are centred around his home country, the UK, but he also goes further afield to look for species in South America. While I am a UK resident myself, there was still much I did not know about many of the places he visited, and his style of writing made even the most mundane environments sound enthralling. I was particularly interested in hearing his take on the rewilding project at Knepp Castle and the effects it is having on the insect diversity there.

Overall this book gives a good account of the ecology of particular bee species and the conservation issues that face them, as well as a lot of general information about the areas he visited and how all these issues feed into the wider narrative of biodiversity conservation. I feel the book was slightly lacking in the specific biology of some of these bees, but the author does indicate that for many rare species there is relatively little information about their biology and life history, so this is understandable.

I would recommend this book for anyone with an interest in ecology and conservation, or those with a particular interest in bees and insects. Having a study background in these subjects would be a benefit, but I feel the author explains concepts sufficiently enough for those not well-versed in scientific writing to understand.

Laura says

I highly recommend this book to anyone with even a passing interest in the natural world, and I am not just talking about exotic creatures in far-flung locations but the unsung bugs struggling to live just outside your door.

Dave Goulson immediately took me back to the joyful days as a kid, getting mucky in the garden in the quest to catch woodlice, crickets anything I could capture in an old ice-cream tub, to then accidentally unleash in the house. Sorry, mum!

It must have been those moments in the past that I found my love for the humble but so vitally important, bee.

This book has reignited my passion for them, and for the natural world as a whole and I can't wait to read the other two books by the author. It's insightful, informative, at times very amusing when he shares his personal experiences, anecdotes and comments. I found his opinions on how we view the natural world particularly compelling.

Overall, even if you only have a smidge of interest in bees, I do recommend reading it. Anyway, one thing is for sure; I am going to make it my mission to go on a bug hunting adventure this year.

Nat says

Anybody who knows me will know that bumblebees are my favourite animal so I thought this book was amazing and I cannot wait to read some of Goulson's other books in the future!!

Jess Jackson says

I liked it. A really interesting read that moved along at a nice pace. There was ALOT of facts that I never knew about Bees, some were really interesting some not so much.

I would recommend this only to someone who already had an interest in Bees and there habits.
