



BWARS

Information Sheet

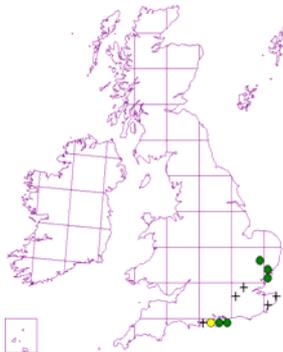
The Bee-Wolf (*Philanthus triangulum*)

Tristan Bantock

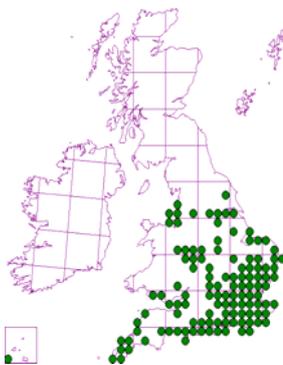
- * A spectacular specialist predator of Honeybees
- * Formerly extremely rare
- * Now found widely, and often commonly, across southern Britain
- * Favours open sunny areas in sandy habitats

Featuring:

- Background information
- Distribution in UK and the world
- Habitat requirements
- Conservation



UK distribution in 1987



UK distribution in 2010

Background and Distribution

This magnificent wasp stocks its nest burrows exclusively with Honeybees, and this habit has led to it being known colloquially as the 'Bee-Wolf'. For years this species was an extreme rarity, with a population on the Isle of Wight and others in a few scattered localities in southern England. Since the mid-1980's the species has expanded its range dramatically and is now found widely across southern Britain and even as far north as Yorkshire. The species is widespread on continental Europe, where rapid range extensions have been shown to occur in response to periods of increased summer warmth.

Females are large imposing wasps, most easily recognised by the narrow reddish stripe behind the eye and extensively pale face. Males are smaller with striking bluish eyes and a distinctive trident-like mark between the eyes.

Habitat and Conservation

A species of open sandy ground on lowland heathland and coastal dunes. Less commonly seen on isolated sandy areas such as on chalk heath, post-industrial sites, city parks and gardens.

Nests are constructed in level or sloping ground in open sunny situations on sandy soil and can often be found in large aggregations. They have multiple chambers, each of which is provisioned with several bees. It is estimated that over 100 bees may be collected by a single female during the flight period, which lasts from early July to mid-August. In some parts of the world *Philanthus* can be a major predator of honeybees, but this is not the case in Britain. Both sexes can be found at a range of open-access flowers and females aggressively defend nectar sources.

Although no special conservation measures are now required for this species, nesting areas require the maintenance of bare ground.

Continued monitoring of known sites will allow for future shifts in range to be detected.



A female Bee-Wolf carrying a captured honeybee



A female entering her nest burrow with prey



A female Bee-Wolf nectaring on Sea Holly (*Eryngium maritimum*)



A male Bee-Wolf outside a nest burrow

Hymettus Ltd is the premier source of advice on the conservation of bees, wasps and ants within Great Britain and Ireland.

<http://hymettus.org.uk/>

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/>

For further information, contact:

[spmr\[at\]msn.com](mailto:spmr[at]msn.com)

Photos: **T. Bantock**