

In April 2014, SE London naturalist and photographer Dusty Gedge took a stroll on his local patch and found something rather interesting. He tells us about his find here and about the wider potential of social media for helping with recording:

“The power of twitter to support biodiversity research was highlighted this week. The discovery of a globally endangered plant in the US, photographed and posted on twitter without the photographer realising the significance of the find, made me think of the recent discovery of *Osmia cornuta* in the UK. I posted a picture of a bee I found at the edge of Blackheath, SE London, on facebook back in mid April 2014 and asked David Notton [@NHM_Bees](#) whether it was a Tawny Mining bee. Initially he thought it to have been an *Osmia bicolor*. Three years later, however, [@NHM_Bees](#) reexamined the image and informed me it was actually the first record of *Osmia cornuta* in the UK! Of course this makes me feel rather good. Yet it also brings into focus the power of the new world of social networks.

I have only a cursory knowledge of bees and insects, although I am getting better... I have a mid-level knowledge of wildflowers in the UK. However, birds are my forte in terms of natural science. I would have loved to have engaged more with insects when I was younger, yet it was so hard. To find something and to be able to identify it was a major task - identification keys were lengthy and there is only so much time in the day. Over the last ten years things have improved somewhat, as many of us can post pictures and tag experts in. We get rewarded with a name, or maybe only a family, but we are now able to immerse ourselves in an area that we had been partly excluded from. I am sure there are now more budding entomologists than there were 20 years ago. This is all about accessibility. With this new accessibility, citizens are helping natural scientists all over the world not only to discover new species ranges, as with that endangered plant in the USA, but also new species for a country. So although some may bemoan the obsession with social networks, when it comes to understanding our natural world they have a power that can benefit biodiversity professionals and amateurs alike.”

Osmia cornuta female - photographed by Dusty Gedge, Greenwich, London 2014.

Thanks to Dusty for sharing the details of his find and for his views on the significance of social media to entomology. Martin Honey was the first to identify *O. cornuta* in Britain, at Barnes in 2017. Since then it has been recorded there, with breeding at the London Wetland Centre in 2018. Dusty's own story continues, with Dusty finding a healthy *Osmia cornuta* population visiting Green Alkanet flowers in the same area of Blackheath (Greenwich), as well as others in nearby Lewisham, on 19th-20th April 2018. There have also been sightings this April in Battersea by Max Barclay. I went to Blackheath on April 21st to try and see them for myself and found at least two nectaring at Green Alkanet flowers.

Osmia cornuta originates from continental Europe where it is a significant pollinator of early flowering fruit trees – hence the vernacular name of Orchard Bee. We don't yet know how well-established it is in this country and what impact it may have on native species but it may compete for nest sites with the common native *Osmia bicornis*. This attractive and fairly distinctive spring-flying bee is clearly consolidating its foothold in the London area and is one well worth looking out for.

For images, take a look at Steven Falk's
Flickr: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/63075200@N07/sets/72157691453175962/>

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