
Collecting wild flower seeds on the Uists for propagation

Richard Weddle, Edna Stewart & Morag Mackinnon

Glasgow Natural History Society, c/o Graham Kerr Building, University of Glasgow, Glasgow G12 8QQ
E-mail: richard.weddle@tiscali.co.uk

Three volunteers from Glasgow Natural History Society visited the Uists for a week in September 2005 to collect seeds from plants known to be used by the great yellow bumblebee (*Bombus distinguendus*) over the months when it is active. Six sites were visited and a useful amount of seed (just under 1kg) was collected for many of the species; some of this stock has since been used for reseeded in the Balranald area.

The species collected were: bird's-foot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus* L.), tufted vetch (*Vicia cracca* L.), red clover (*Trifolium pratense* L.), yellow rattle (*Rhinanthus minor* L.), kidney vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria* L.), lesser burdock (*Arctium minus* (Hill) Bernh.), and knapweed (*Centaurea nigra* L.). We failed to find any mature seedheads of yellow iris (*Iris pseudacorus* L.), and were too late in the year to collect seeds of cow parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris* (L.)).

The conclusions of this feasibility study were that seed collecting is labour-intensive and would need to be done over a longer period during the year in order to cover the full range of species adequately. The yield of seed was low relative to amount of seed-heads collected, because some of the seed had already been lost through natural dispersion or consumption by invertebrates etc.

Propagating seed for inclusion in seed mixes, though a useful aim, was not achievable in the timescale of this project, though it remains a medium-term objective. The most effective procedure would be to harvest seeds mechanically from successful 'cover areas' on each island, and to use the cleaned seed for reseeded those, and other, areas in the same locality.

In the meantime, bumblebee habitat areas could be created or improved using existing wildflower seed-mixes and allowing natural reseeded from nearby areas.

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