FINALIST IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT – CATEGORY

Bumblebee Conservation Trust/University of Stirling

Bumblebee Conservation

Bumblebees have declined alarmingly in the last 60 years, with three of the 25 UK species becoming extinct nationwide and several more species close to national extinction. These declines threaten pollination of crops and wildflowers. A university research group has spent 15 years studying why bumblebees have declined, improving our understanding of their ecology, and assessing means by which declines could be reversed.

Innovation

In 2006 the team struck upon the idea of starting a membership-based charity to translate knowledge into informed action, and so the Bumblebee Conservation Trust was launched in May. The aim of the trust is to prevent any further extinctions of bumblebees, and to reverse population declines by achieving a patch of flower-rich habitat on every farm in the UK, and a clump of bee-friendly plants in every garden.

Strategies to achieve this goal included:

- Outreach, education, raising awareness
- Practical conservation
- Lobbying

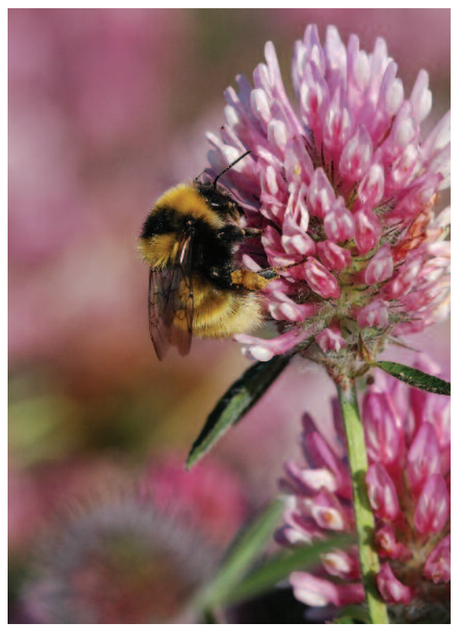
Knowledge transfer

Despite the research work resulting in many scientific publications, it did not result in one single extra bee. Without a mechanism to communicate conservation change needs to a wider audience, a reversal in bee populations seemed unlikely.

Research continues to direct trust conservation policy. Recent studies suggest that a shortage of bumblebees is now directly reducing yield of crops such as field beans and raspberries in the UK, providing a powerful argument for the trust to use in persuading farmers to incorporate bee conservation measures on their farm.

Impact

As a result of this project, the number of people that are aware of these issues, and the number of people involved in trying to do something positive for bees has grown enormously as a direct result of the founding of the Bumblebee Conservation Trust. There can be few members of the UK population who have not been exposed to media coverage relating to the trust and bumblebee declines.



Many members of the trust and other members of the public have taken it upon themselves to plant flowers for bumblebees in the gardens or local parks. Farmers have also been engaged and have been invited to come and learn about the importance of bees and pollination.

Through various “citizen science” schemes more than 3,500 people have been directly involved in counting, identifying or photographing bumblebees in their garden or local park. Eight thousand people have bought the booklet “Gardening for Bumblebees”.

If the goal to persuade every farmer and gardener in the UK to have a patch of flowers for bumblebees is achieved, the broader benefits for biodiversity will be substantial.

At present, the trust employs six full-time staff, based in Stirling, Kent and Hampshire, and has 6,500 paying members.

Key points

- A bumblebees shortage is threatening crop yield
- Outreach, conservation and lobbying provides a mechanism for change
- 6,500 paying members of the trust
- 8,000 purchased the publication “Gardening for Bumblebees”
- 3,500 involved in a “citizen scheme” to evaluate bee populations

Primary team

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