Grant is the bees knees!

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Today HLF announced a grant of £340,000 for an ambitious project by the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, based at Stirling University, to conserve a variety of endangered bumblebee species and their habitats throughout the UK.

Bumblebees are fundamental to our ecosystem with hundreds of species of wildflower, fruits such as raspberries, strawberries and tomatoes and vegetables such as runner beans, dependent on them for pollination. The total value of pollination in the UK exceeds £400million. However, over the last 70 years there has been a dramatic decrease in their population with two species becoming totally extinct and six of the remaining 24 species now listed as UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) priority species.

In the UK, the flower rich grasslands on which bumblebees depend have reduced by 97% since the 1930's. This is primarily a result of a move to more intensive forms of agriculture after the Second World War, resulting in the loss of hay meadows and clover leys. Meanwhile changes in domestic gardens, with a preference for decking and mown lawns, has also meant fewer flowers for the bees. This loss of habitat has led to fragmentation with species surviving in isolated areas such as military land, grassland nature reserves and coastal grasslands. This isolation results in inbreeding which raises the likelihood of further extinctions.

HLF's grant will enable the Bumblebee Conservation Trust to begin a three-year conservation project, helping to protect the bumblebees and their habitat for the future. Working with landowners, farmers, the public and schools across the UK, the project will raise awareness of these important pollinators and help inform people on how best to protect them. Flower-rich habitat will be provided where it is needed most to reconnect the small isolated populations while a extensive awareness-raising programme, including an interactive website, community talks, learning packs for children, and a national wildlife self-assessment garden scheme, will be rolled out across the country.

Volunteers have played a key role in the development of this project and it is anticipated that, after training, around 500 regular bumblebee recorders with gather information on the population trends.

Chris Packham, BBCT President, Television Presenter and Naturalist, welcomed the award: "This is great news for bumblebee conservation in the UK. The funding boost from HLF will enable the Bumblebee Conservation Trust to better reach and engage with the general public on this important subject. The funding will also significantly increase the volume and quality of conservation work that they can undertake, helping to safeguard populations of some of our rarest and most beautiful bumblebees. That means more colourful flower-rich meadows for both wildlife and people to enjoy."

Colin McLean, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in Scotland said:"This much-needed project gives us all the opportunity to learn more about the bumblebees and the role they play in our biodiversity. Young people are the future custodians of our natural heritage so their passion for it is vital. With some of the awareness-raising focussed specifically towards a young audience, it will inspire and empower them to help safeguard bumblebee populations for future generations."

Further information

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