

When Plan A becomes Plan Bee

21-year-old Libby Welbourn from Forest Fields and Owen Hackett, also aged 21 from Cotgrave, are launching a new project called Notts Plan Bee - in an attempt to halt the worrying decline of Nottingham's bumblebees and wild honeybees - and they're calling on everyone in Nottingham to help by planting bee-friendly cottage garden plants such as foxgloves, geraniums, honeysuckle, lavender and herbs.

Even if you don't have a garden, you can still help by planting bee-friendly plants in window boxes, hanging baskets or flowerpots!

In addition, Libby and Owen are also going to be busy over the winter, growing bee-friendly wildflowers from seed, and they're looking for allotment-holders and community gardens for example, who would like to give their wildflowers a home next spring.

Alternatively, Libby and Owen are happy to provide allotment-holders and community gardens with wildflower seeds, if you'd prefer to grow your own.

3 species of bumblebee have already become extinct in the UK, with the remaining 24 species in decline, some to the point of dying out and being lost forever. In addition, the UK has just one type of honeybee.

Libby explains:

"Bees are essential to the survival of Britain's plants and crops so saving them is something we should all be taking an interest in.

Around £200 million worth of UK commercial crops benefit from being pollinated by bees every year, including broad beans, runner beans and raspberries. Honey alone is worth as much as £30 million to the UK economy annually.

Crop yields are already falling, especially in areas where large fields and few hedgerows mean there's nowhere for bees to nest. In addition, bees pollinate our wildflowers so declining bee populations spell bad news for many of our plants and the wildlife that depends on them - a lack of bees could quite literally change the countryside forever."

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Owen agrees:

“Saving bees isn’t just an issue for people who live in rural areas, there’s no reason why bees can’t thrive in urban areas like Nottingham too, with a bit of help from local people.”

Libby and Owen are also keen to hear from allotment-holders and community gardens willing to house an artificial nesting site for bees.

Libby explains:

“Artificial nesting sites are easy to create out of recycled materials like old plant pots and are a great way of encouraging bees to set up home in the city. Our plan is to establish new nesting sites for bees around the city, with the help of local allotment holders, community gardens and organisations like Nottingham City Council, who can give us access to many of Nottingham’s parks and public open spaces. All people have to do to get involved is get in touch!”

Plan Bee is being supported by Sprout, an environmental project set up the Partnership Council charity based in Hyson Green. Sprout was set up in January 2008 and helps young people like Libby and Owen to set up their own environmental projects.

Scientists believe that bee numbers are falling for a variety of reasons, including disease caused by mites and viruses, changing weather patterns and loss of bee-friendly habitats.

In urban areas, many modern garden flowers produce little pollen and nectar which bees need for food instead they need us to plant wildflowers and traditional cottage garden plants in order to thrive.

Libby and Owen are also looking for volunteers to help with the project. In the future, the pair is also planning family activity days to help spread the word about bee conservation.

To contact Libby and Owen email notts.planbee@googlemail.com or phone Libby on 07591 265 888.

To find out more about Sprout and the Partnership Council please call Rachel Wicks on 0115 970 8200 or email rachel@partnershipcouncil.co.uk

<http://www.partnershipcouncil.co.uk>

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