

BEE FRIENDLY FACT SHEET

This fact-sheet is a simple guide to world of bees and some information on how you can help to support the campaigns to halt the decline of the GB honey bee. We have lost three out of the twenty seven native GB species over the last ten years, your help is desperately needed.

BEE FRIENDLY PLANTS

Perhaps one of the easiest things a person can do is to grow some plants that are beneficial to honeybees, as well as other pollinating insects. You do not need acres of grounds to achieve this, a window box is better than nothing.

Research and experience shows that bees are currently doing better in urban and suburban environments than they are in rural areas. The simple reason is that there are a wider range of beneficial flowers and plants in people's gardens and civic green spaces than there are in the 'monoculture' countryside. Grubbed up hedgerows and loss of orchards and meadows in favour of large fields full of one crop type are reducing the amount of useful plants for bees.

This also raises the question of what is a useful plant for bees and other pollinators. Hanging baskets or flower beds full of bright, showy blooms do not necessarily make them attractive to bees. Some modern-day plants have sacrificed nectar and pollen production for complex forms and loud colours.

A bee is after nectar and pollen. Traditional plants with simpler flower forms are best. Plant nurseries and garden centres are very aware of this and have recently introduced labeling to show those plants that are best for bees.

When planting a 'bee garden' it's also very important to grow a variety of different types that flower at different times of the year, if you can. Bees can forage for most of the year but especially from March to the end of September and need to find flowering plants across that time period – otherwise they eat their honey reserves and starve during 'hibernation' in the winter.

The foraging year starts with them visiting blackthorns, willows, pulmonaria and snowdrops in the early spring, through the heady summer flush of colour with foxgloves, buttercups, lavenders, raspberries and the like, to early autumn shasta daisies and ivy. To name just a few.

Remember that something is better than nothing, so if you can only grow one or two suitable plants then great. That's far better than doing nothing at all.

Currently insects pollinate every third mouthful of food we eat, honeybees are responsible for 80% of that. It pays to grow a few plants to help them survive.

Contact us at GB Underwriting and we will send you a packet of our own Bee Friendly seeds (stock dependent) which you simply shake out in your garden to create your own bee friendly garden.



ADOPT A BEEHIVE

Introduction

Beekeeping is not a cheap hobby to get started in. It also requires a large amount of time and effort on the part of the beekeeper to correctly maintain the hives and harvest the honey – although nowhere near the amount of time and effort when compared to the honeybee!

To help finance beekeeping, in terms of research and increasing the number of beehives and bees across the British Isles, some beekeepers and organisations offer schemes for interested parties to help towards the running costs. These can range from a simple donation to allowing a beekeeper to keep a hive at your property for a small rent (normally some jars of honey).

Currently one of the most popular ways of helping is to 'Adopt-A-Behive'. Different beekeeping organisations offer roughly similar incentives to sign up to their adoption scheme. However the aim of almost all of them is to ensure the welfare of the honeybee, either through research or increasing numbers. Our 'Support The Bee' section below gives a list of websites of bee campaigns, some of them offering an adoption scheme.

Essex Bees

At GB Underwriting we work closely with Daniel and Richard Golding at Essex Bees. These brothers manage our hive for us, supply us with honey and are able to keep us updated with information both locally and nationally. They are also willing to answer any questions from our brokers or staff when the need arises.

GB Underwriting chose Essex Bees as they share the same concerns we do and are determined to do something about it. Being local to us was also a consideration as we launched our campaign. To help finance their aims the brothers have a range of strategies to involve others in their dream – to increase the number of bee colonies across their home county and beyond.

Their adoption scheme costs £30.00 and lasts for a year. In that time you will be sent a welcome letter and certificate, receive 3 newsletters during the year and at harvest time be sent three pounds of honey from your own hive. They also maintain a regular blog that gives the highs and lows of being a beekeeper as well as information gleaned from various beekeeping sources. It's not technical and normally makes for some lighthearted reading. For further information go to www.essexbees.co.uk or telephone Daniel on 07854 662811 or Richard on 07737 942400.

Other Schemes

By visiting the websites in our 'Support' section you will find links to other bee campaigners who utilise the revenue received for similar or different purposes – all equally helpful.

You can make an impact and help the bees and their supporters. We deliberately have not made this appeal 'doom-laden'. However a world without bees is going to be a very sick world indeed. By helping the bee you help other pollinators, which in turn helps other species, both flora and fauna.

For beekeepers it's not all about the honey. As Richard from Essex Bees told us 'I don't really like honey and I'm allergic to beestings. But, in the overall scheme of things, I believe we're doing something important. That's reward enough'.



SUPPORT THE BEE CAMPAIGN

There are a number of organisations and groups of individuals that are helping to support the pollinating bee across Great Britain and beyond.

Although excluded from this list, the hobby beekeeper is arguably the most important person when it comes to supporting bees. You can help them too by buying local honey or allowing one of their hives to be sited at your premises.

The following directory of websites is by no means exhaustive but gives you the opportunity to see the work being undertaken by concerned groups, as well as our own Government, and links to other sites and local contacts.

National Bee Unit

A government maintained laboratory, information and bee inspector service with various online resources. Also hosts the voluntary register of beekeepers called 'Beebase'. Visit the website at: <https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase>

British Beekeepers' Association

The main body for amateur beekeepers in the UK. Full of useful information and links to local beekeeper associations. Visit the website at: www.bbka.org.uk

Co-Op Group's Plan Bee Campaign

Set-up by the Co-Operative Group, famous for supermarkets and funeral directors, to help finance and save the bee. Visit the website at: www.co-operative.coop/planbee

Bee Part Of It

A campaign set-up by the BBC.

Visit the website at: www.bbc.co.uk/breathingplaces/beepartofit

Essex Bees

The beekeepers who maintain our bees and give help and advice when needed. They offer a range of strategies to help the community become involved with supporting the honeybee.

Visit the website at: www.essexbees.co.uk

Bee Guardian Foundation

An American website but worth a visit to see how beekeepers are coping on the other side of 'the pond'.

Visit the website at: www.beeguardian.org

Natural Beekeeping.

When honey isn't everything you could do no worse than visit these websites to learn more:

Visit the website at: www.naturalbeekeepingtrust.org

Visit the website at: www.biobees.com

River of Flowers

A lovely website that campaigns to create urban meadows.

Visit the website at: www.riverofflowers.org

Bumblebees

You don't harvest their honey but they're important and, arguably, cuddlier than the honeybee! These two sites are worth a visit:

Visit the website at: www.bumblebeeconservation.org.uk

Visit the website at: www.bumblebee.org

