

Just Bee-cause

It's not just a Bee-cause.



Photographs courtesy of Hartlepool Borough Council

In the good old days' days way back in the mid 50s, some remember our gardens and wild places being an active high with pollinators of all types buzzing and flitting around from flower to flower with a seemingly unending workload. This is not some halcyon reflective memory; meadows and road verges were adorned with an abundant variety of wildflowers.



Sadly, as surely all of you will be aware; these vital insect pollinators are on the decrease. Although beekeepers, whether intentionally or not, do their part to at least help *Apis mellifera* (the honey bee) as a species to stay in contention, unfortunately, most other insect pollinators are now in decline for reasons too numerous to mention here but nevertheless, are fast decreasing in numbers.

In many cases, species like the Great yellow bumblebee are ever threatened and near to extinction due to depletion of an estimated 97% of our natural wildflower habitat since the 1930s. So much so that after much lobbying from prospective action groups, in November 2014 the Government introduced a National Pollinator Strategy.

Although this sounds good on paper, like all strategies, it's only as good as the action taken after the strategical plan is written. Sadly, it's too late for some that are already extinct. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act together with the Highways Agency Biodiversity action Plan (HABAP) places a duty on government departments and public authorities in England and Wales to show regard for conserving biodiversity in all their actions. In particular, this regard must be shown on public authority managed land, including roads and verges.

Typically, this strategy places much of the onus with local councils. It is true that positive individual selective action for insect pollinators has been and is being taken by communities, businesses and local authorities. However, to equal the challenge of reversing pollinator decline, this action must be scaled up and facilitated by the right positive policy framework such as the roadside verge biodiversity scheme. Currently the buck tends to end with the local wildlife trust and other charitable organisations. In the words of one knowledgeable professional "this subject is a minefield". The buck just keeps passing, with little policing or input from central government. Consequently not a lot is achieved to provide the vital expansion in the national corridor of habitat, so much needed nationwide to alleviate problems associated with inbreeding as an additional reason for decrease in pollinator species.

Beekeepers are generally active in helping promote the importance of all pollinators essential to our countries biodiversity and food production.

Recently, beekeepers with apiaries in Hartlepool have been fortunate enough to produce some of the finest natural wildflower honey ever tasted and their bees have blossomed too. This being largely due to the fact that some three years ago Hartlepool council adopted a national road verge scheme where suitable tracts of road verge were seeded and naturalised with a variety of wild flowers. This was so successful that year on year they have expanded this scheme to other suitable areas within the town.



Just search online for 'Hartlepool wildflowers' and follow the links to delve as deeply as you need to go, or simply look at the many photographs and positive comments this scheme has generated.

And so finally Here's the point.There are circa 400,000 square miles of managed roadside verge in the UK alone. Imagine how beneficial it would be to biodiversity infrastructure if local councils adopted this scheme with the same positivity as Hartlepool and similar other councils do in suitable areas of verges throughout the UK.

Surely it's a no brainer, right? Councils save on grass cutting; motorists save on single lane congestion delays necessary throughout the grass verge cutting period and the public benefit with stunning visual wild flower displays as good as any parks department could hope to achieve with a formal display at a fraction of the cost. Most importantly, biodiversity regeneration for all wildlife, animals, birds and all insect pollinators would receive a major boost. Just why some local authorities drag their heels in implementing this strategy is beyond belief to the many others striving to get this message across. Organisations



such as **The Bee Coalition**, consisting of various eco minded charities working together to express public concerns about the future of insect pollinators and the vital services they provide, continue highlighting to the Government the need for action surrounding their protection in England and Wales.

Try typing Policies for Pollinators in your search engine to view an excellent report from The Bee Coalition with recommendations to our government.

Next try searching for 'Countryside Strategy pdf' for a long list of well meaning council strategy plans. In most cases within these plans you will find subtitled; 'Implementing the strategy.' Read them, and then **Please!** If not for the sake of wildlife and pollinators generally, then for the quality of your local honey, I urge you to make your voice heard this year, then continue until our local authorities see sense and take notice to act positively.



Enough voices will eventually trigger some action.

Lots of excellent information can be found with a web search such as the Wildlife Trust's 'Policies for pollinators' as part of The Bee Coalition. Also visit <http://www.plantlife.org.uk/roadvergecampaign> to sign their campaign direct.

Collectively we as a community can make a big difference. We are in the process of helping to get this set as a higher profile action both locally and nationwide.

"Bees and other wild pollinators are fascinating, beautiful, and vital to our food production. They have pollinated our crops for millennia; now it's time to return the favour." Dave Goulson, founder of the Bumblebee Conservation Trust.

Please!....take a little of your time to act in time. Help us to save the buzz.

Thank you,

Jim Turnbull

Cleveland Beekeepers Association