

## Bees and other pollinators

Bees apparently provide us with every third mouthful of food that we eat. Without them we would not be able to grow many of the foods we enjoy such as tomatoes, raspberries, apples, blueberries, strawberries, runner beans, broad beans, the list goes on ..... These popular and hard-working insects also contribute a substantial sum to the country's economy each year.

As we know all too well, bees along with many other pollinating insects, are in decline. They rely on a diverse range of landscapes for their food and shelter, from wildflower-rich meadows, heathland, hedgerows, field margins, alongside our gardens and parks. Unfortunately, over the past 100 years, many of these habitats have been lost due to changing agricultural practices and urban expansion.

### What can we do to reverse this decline?

You will be pleased to know that no matter how small, every additional action increases the benefit to our insect populations. Locally, the Great Ouse Valley forms a part of one of the growing number of B-lines being developed by the charity Bug Life and other environmental groups. These are corridors which expand and re-connect the remaining wildflower-rich sites to help our declining pollinators to move across the landscape. Imagine trying to travel around the UK without our road and rail network. Or imagine if nine out of every ten miles of road just didn't exist – life would be impossible! That is the situation faced by our vital pollinators and other bugs. Our gardens, community green spaces and even window boxes are helping to add to these corridors.

Did you know that there are over 15 million gardens across the UK? Put together, they cover an area 7 times the size of the Isle of Wight ([wildaboutgardens.org.uk](http://wildaboutgardens.org.uk)). If each of these gardens were cared for in a wildlife friendly way it could make a huge difference not only to insects but to a whole host of species which are vital to keeping our environment healthy. Here are some things you might like to try:

- Planting nectar and pollen-rich flowers. Many garden centres sell “bee friendly” seed mixes. You might prefer to grow bee friendly veg such as runner beans and tomatoes. Herbs are great too, bees love thyme, lavender, mint, wild marjoram and sage. If you have a bigger space, many flowering shrubs and trees are great for pollinators. Check out the Royal Horticultural Society website for specific details ([rhs.org.uk](http://rhs.org.uk))
- If you have children, they might enjoy making homes for solitary bees from recycled materials. There are lots of ideas on the internet e.g. <https://growwild.kew.org/get-involved/resources/how-to/make-solitary-bee-house>
- Save yourself some effort and don't be too tidy, leave seed heads for insects to shelter in and have a mix of long and short grass plus a few “weeds” which are great sources of nectar.
- Encourage natural predators to colonise your garden then you can save time and money by not using chemical pesticides and fungicides. Leaving log piles and having a compost heap are great ideas and are a good way of coping without a green bin!

- As well as food, like all animals, pollinators need water. A shallow pond would be wonderful but if you don't have room but do have a bird bath, put a few stones in it so that it is shallow enough for insects. You could even just put out a saucer of water.

### **Buckden's own B Lines**

The footpaths around the village are excellent places to look for bees and other insects. They contain a diversity of plant life, many interesting wild-flowers and, in many cases, run along hedgerows. To encourage young people (and older ones too!) to take note of what is in their environment, the Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity Advisory Group of the Parish Council have put together a number of "Biodiversity Bingo", spotters' guides. There are four categories: Insects, Birds, Wildflowers and Hedgerows and Trees. Each category will have four versions, one for each season of the year. These can be found on the Buckden Parish Council Website under "The Parish" tab: Walking in Buckden and complement the seasonal "Round-About-Buckden" and our "Trees and Bees" leaflets.