

Funding success offers hope for one of Britain's rarest bumblebees

Wednesday 15 November, 2017

Bumblebee Conservation Trust has been awarded £720,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for an ambitious initiative to transform the Peak District and Derbyshire into a haven for bumblebees and wild pollinators, and to protect the area's Bilberry bumblebee – one of Britain's rarest bumblebees.

Thanks to this support made possible by National Lottery players, the conservation charity can now formally begin its three-year Pollinating the Peak project – tackling bumblebee declines with its partners Chatsworth, Chesterfield Borough Council, Derbyshire County Council, Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, Little Green Space, Moors for the Future Partnership, National Trust and Peak District National Park.

Action will include working with local people to protect and boost wild bee populations by providing flower-rich habitats, monitoring bumblebees, and creating buzzing communities and schools.

The star of the story will be the Bilberry bumblebee – now only found in the Peak and a few other areas of the UK. This charismatic bee is found on Peakland moors, where it has a huge impact in supporting moorland plants – including by pollinating bilberries, a plant it has helped keep alive for centuries.

"Pollinating the Peak is an exciting project to save the sound of summer by celebrating and protecting our wonderful wild pollinators. It's about thousands of people learning about our local bumblebees, caring more about them, and planting, monitoring and speaking out for them. We're hugely grateful to National Lottery players for making this possible," said Sally Cuckney, Pollinating the Peak Project Manager.

"Bumblebees are vital for many of the plants we grow and eat, but they're having a hard time. They need us just as much as we need them – and Pollinating the Peak will be offering all sorts of ways for people to get involved and ensure a brighter future for these hard-working pollination superstars."

The charity and its partners will work with communities, local authorities and landowners across the region to create and restore at least 100 hectares of flower-rich habitat.

Activities and training will involve people in natural heritage and bee conservation, including bee-friendly gardening, so that individuals and communities are able to take small, easy actions that together make a big difference. Innovative methods in schools will highlight the science and importance of pollinators, and there will be engagement with local communities, tourists and visitors at festivals and well dressings.

Local people will also be able to learn bee identification skills and take part in surveys to monitor bee species, numbers and habitats. This citizen science will strengthen conservation work and help provide early warning of bee declines – especially important in the Peak where a lack of local bumblebee records means that the Bilberry bumblebee could be declining faster than previously thought.

Jonathan Platt, Head of HLF East Midlands, said: "The Peak District and Derbyshire, with its diverse habitats, offers major opportunities for helping pollinators, including this rare bumblebee. We are delighted that through this project National Lottery players can help protect the Bilberry bumblebee and encourage more local people, and the 10 million or so visitors to the area each year, to learn about it and the habitats that help it thrive."

HLF granted an initial £150,000 in 2016 to help fund a year of development for Pollinating the Peak. Following a rigorous assessment this summer, HLF has now awarded almost £720,000 for delivery of the project over the next three years.

Loss of flower-rich habitat is the biggest threat to bumblebees' survival, with 97% of the UK's wildflower meadows lost since World War II. Climate change, disease and pesticides may also be major threats.

Bumblebee Conservation Trust is a UK-based charity that was established because of serious concerns about the 'plight of the bumblebee'. In the last 80 years, bumblebee populations have crashed and two species have become extinct in the UK. For details, visit bumblebeeconservation.org.

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