Voting urged to help save Scotland's Great yellow bumblebee

Tuesday 14 November, 2017

An ambitious project in the Outer Hebrides to save the Great yellow bumblebee – which some experts believe is the UK's most endangered bumblebee – is to be launched if the Bumblebee Conservation Trust wins an online vote.

The charity's 'Help find our bumblebees. Where's Bombus?' project needs votes to be entered into the finals of the Aviva Community Fund, where it could potentially win £25,000. Voting is open to anyone and runs to 21 November 2017. Votes can be cast at http://bit.ly/2hdfb82.

Success would enable the Bumblebee Conservation Trust to expand its work for the declining Great yellow bumblebee (Bombus distinguendus), and to deliver a programme of awareness-raising and training events about bumblebees, in the Outer Hebrides next year.

"Bumblebees are in decline, and the situation is serious. Did you know that one in every three mouthfuls of food you eat has been pollinated by a bee or similar pollinating insect? That's a lot of our food!" said Katy Malone, Bumblebee Conservation Trust's Scotland Conservation Officer.

"We want to increase awareness and train local people in the Outer Hebrides to look for and record our bumblebees – in particular the Great yellow bumblebee."

Once found all over the UK, the Great yellow bumblebee has suffered a massive decline. Today the species is only found in a few clusters in the remote north and west of Scotland – on the north coast and some of the islands. Its range is now restricted to machair and other flower-rich areas in the Orkneys, Scottish islands, Caithness and Sutherland.

The project will focus on the islands of Lewis, Harris, North and South Uist, Barra and Eriskay.

A festival of bees and wildflowers will also be held to recruit people of all ages from local communities to become the next generation of entomologists.

To protect species like the Great yellow bumblebee, the Bumblebee Conservation Trust needs to know where they are. Here citizen science can play a key role – with volunteers getting involved to help find and count these vital pollinators.

Funding from the Aviva Community Fund competition would allow the Trust to help volunteers set up BeeWalk surveys – a national bumblebee monitoring scheme – on the islands. The Outer Hebrides is a key area of the UK where more volunteer BeeWalkers are needed.

"BeeWalk allows us to gain an accurate understanding of current bumblebee populations and distributions. It is the only abundance-based monitoring scheme in Britain of a major pollinating group – and the only way that we have of detecting population declines before it's too late to reverse them," said Katy.

Volunteer BeeWalkers are trained in bumblebee identification. They are shown how to set up a BeeWalk and monitor bumblebees in their local community, walking the same fixed route – called a transect – at least once a month from March to October.

Currently, the UK has 24 species of bumblebee. In the last 80 years, bumblebee populations have crashed. Two UK species went extinct during the 20th century, including the Short-haired bumblebee, which the Trust is aiming to re-introduce through a reintroduction project.

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.

Aviva Community Fund supports and recognizes important causes in local communities. Everyone can vote and the project with the most votes will be entered into the finals, where a judging panel will award the funds. Everyone registering gets 10 votes to give to one project or to split across various projects.

If you would like to know more or to become involved, please contact Katy Malone on 075544 14052 or

Media:



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Bumblebee Conservation Trust is a UK-based charity that was established because of serious concerns about the ‘plight of the bumblebee’. For details, visit bumblebeeconservation.org.

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