

SOS for Honey Bees

Legacy Pack

theWI
INSPIRING WOMEN



HOW YOU
HELPED THE
HONEY BEE

Campaigns

'SOS for Honey Bees'



The SOS for Honey Bees campaign arose out of the resolution, SOS for Honey Bees which was passed at the June 2009 AGM

SOS for Honey Bees

"Honey Bees play a vital role in the pollination of food crops and in our environment. In view of concerns about the accelerating decline in the UK honey bee population, this meeting urges HM Government to increase funding for research into Bee Health."

(Moved by: Susan Jonas, Hindon & Fonthill Bishop WI, Wiltshire Federation) (Seconded by: Lyn Jennings, Grappenhall WI, Cheshire federation)

Carried by a 99.4 per cent majority at the June 2009 AGM in the Royal Albert Hall

The decline of honey bees represents a major loss in biodiversity, as honey bees are not only responsible for producing honey, but play a vital role in pollinating plants. Approximately a third of our human diet is directly dependent on bees, making them central to our existence.

Honey bees were threatened by pests and diseases for which treatments are not fully understood or are ineffective. Compounded with a 30% loss over the previous winter, such declines amounted to a major threat to biodiversity, not just for bees but for the many species of plants which they help to pollinate.

What the WI called for:

The WI called on the Government to:

Recognise the honey bees' importance in pollinating the food we all rely on and ensure that this is reflected in the research which is carried out using government funding.

The WI called for the research projects funded through the Insect Pollinators Initiative to focus on the needs of the honey bee as it is the single most important pollinator for UK food crops.

The WI called for research to be undertaken into all the challenges honey bees face: pesticides, diseases, mites, over-farming, food supplies and the nutrient mix. This would inform suggestions about how honey bees can be made healthy again, including reviewing farming practices to make them more sustainable.

The WI called on local authorities and individuals to:

Encourage bees to flourish and cultivate more of their natural habitat by:

- Making sure that honey bees are taken into consideration when choosing flowers and plants to place on community land.
- Individually making sure that there is a wealth and diversity of food for bees in window boxes, borders and gardens across the whole of the UK.
- Gaining an understanding of the importance of bees to our habitat and food security, and linking up with other people in communities to ensure that the importance of bees is recognised locally.



Bee Ambassadors visited the Food and Environment Research Agency to see the work of the National Bee Unit!

What the WI did:

Lobbied Government

WI members wrote to their MPs to lobby for bees to get their fair share of funding for pollinator research, and lobbied their local councils to make public spaces bee friendly. NFWI Chair Ruth Bond attended a stakeholder reception in the 10 Downing Street garden, hosted by Sarah Brown, to recognise the importance of honey bees as pollinators.

FERA Visit

A group of Bee Ambassadors visited the Food and Environment Research Agency to see the work of the National Bee Unit. Members learned about the work of the Unit in controlling bee pests and diseases and advising beekeepers.

Bee Aware Action Week – October 2009

Members from around the country held Bee Aware days in their local communities to raise awareness about the plight of the honey bee. Members challenged themselves to eat food exclusively pollinated by bees for one day.



**Honey cakes for Bee Aware Week
Bee Ambassadors Conference**

Many WI members pledged to become Bee Ambassadors, and to spread the word about the plight of the honey bee in their own communities. Over 60 members attended the Bee Ambassadors Conference, which was held at Denman College, home to its own beehives. Speakers included Lord Davies of Oldham, a Defra Minister, Professor Francis Ratnieks (the UK's only professor of apiculture, from the University of Sussex), Martin Smith, the President of the British Beekeepers Association and Stuart Bailey, Chairman of Rowse Honey Ltd who sponsored the conference. After lunch, conference attendees took part in one of three workshops: making candles out of beeswax, making a bee-inspired bag, or gardening with bees in mind.

WI HIVE of FAME



WI HIVE of FAME



More treats from Bee Aware week!



Members inspecting the bees on a visit to the National Bee Unit



Cottenham WI publicised the campaign with a Save the Honey Bee float at the village's annual Feast Parade

Women's Institute latest champion of the bees
– The Telegraph

Women's institute gets busy with bee SOS campaign
– The Mirror

More wild flowers to be planted to save honey bees, says WI
– The Telegraph

What the WI has achieved

Funding for pollinator research

WI members across England and Wales pushed to ensure that honey bees received their fair share of the £10 million Insect Pollinator Initiative research fund. Two of the projects funded deal exclusively with honey bees, and they feature in six more of the nine projects. Research is now being carried out into issues like bee diseases, the effect of mite control chemicals and pesticides on honey bee learning, and the varroa mite. Honey bees also feature in projects to look at crop pollination in the UK, possible links between wildflower and pollinator decline, pollinators in urban areas and bee nutrition.

Dr Chris Connolly, from the University of Dundee who will research the effects of pesticides and other chemicals on bee behaviour said:

“Thank you all for the very effective campaigning of the Women's Institute without your concern on the issue I may not have become aware of the problem and certainly no funding would have been made available. I share your concern and that is why I have diverted my research attention from human health to that of our insects.”

Making politicians bee aware

Lobbying from WI members has helped put honey bees on the political map – with MPs tabling questions and debating the issue in Parliament. Julie Girling, MEP for the South East even mentioned the WI during a debate in the European Parliament. Julie said: “A key organisation in the UK, leading the fight to protect our humble bumbles and honey bees are the Women's Institute who maintain that approximately a third of our human diet is directly dependent on bees, making them central to our existence.”

Getting the public buzzing about bees

WI members have been taking action all over England and Wales to raise awareness of the plight of the honey bee. From encouraging local authorities to plant bee friendly flowers, to giving out seed packs and baking honey cakes, WI members have stopped at nothing to create a buzz about bees.

WI HIVE of FAME



2



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Rotherfield Evening WI got buzzing during the campaign

Creating a buzz at Llanstephan carnival

Case studies

1) Hope Street Honey

Members of Liverpool Central WI matched a passion for bees with a strong head for heights when they installed 40,000 on the roof of their headquarters. The bees weathered last winter's snow, and the volunteer WI beekeepers are hoping to have jars of 'Hope Street Honey' for sale by the end of summer 2011.

2) Creating a buzzing garden

A fundraising afternoon tea raised £450 to help Whitley WI and Bee Ambassador Sue Abbott kickstart their project to create a buzzing haven. WI members and volunteers cleared a patch of ground in a corner of the village that was transformed into a bee friendly garden.

3) Upper Clatford WI

A three-course Bee Lunch sparked this WI's plans to create a bee friendly garden at the village hall, and to purchase a beehive and bees. Soon the garden was

sown with wildflowers, and WI members were helping look after their own thriving beehive

4) Ramsey WI

Fabulous WI cakes were sold to purchase a hive and beekeeping equipment and send a volunteer WI member on a beekeeping course. With the hive ready and waiting, a swarm was found in May 2010 and the bees were soon settled into the hive. After a successful honey harvest, 15 lucky WI members even received jars of honey at the end of the summer.

5) Leenside (Hucknall) WI

A Bee Garden Open Day was held in June this year to showcase the WI's hard work in transforming what used to be a piece of wasteland into a bee paradise. Late WI President Marian Shaw lobbied local councils and MPs about the plight of the honey bee, and helped the WI join forces with local schools, gardeners and the council to create the garden.

Campaigns

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Keep on taking action for honey bees

Pledge to Sow Seeds for Bees

It is really important that we keep building on the work that has already been done by WI members to increase forage for bees and pollinators. That's why we are calling on all members to pledge to sow seeds for bees every year. Remember to plant a range of flowers so that bees can have access to pollen from spring to late summer. Why not hold a Big Buzzing Dig in your community to revamp communal areas and make them bee friendly?

Support local honey

Many WIs have built links with local beekeepers throughout the course of the campaign, so we are calling on members to keep supporting them by buying local honey. Reputed to help prevent hayfever, the taste of honey also reflects the range of plants that bees have foraged on. Why not hold a honey tasting evening to taste test different honeys from around your local area?

Push for more research into neonicotinoid pesticides, and reduce your own usage

In light of increasing concerns about the role of neonicotinoid pesticides in honey bee losses, the NFWI is renewing its call for more research into their effects. You may wish to write to your MP to ask if they will push the Government for more research into their effects on bees. Neonicotinoids are found in some garden products too, so WI members are urged to check labels carefully, and avoid using these chemicals in the garden. You may also wish to write to your local authority and ask them whether they use neonicotinoids on their green spaces and parks.

Challenges ahead

While the rate of colony loss has decreased in the two years since the campaign was launched, beekeepers are still extremely concerned about bee losses. This year the British Bee Keepers Association reported that 13.6 per cent of colonies were lost last year over winter. While this is an improvement on previous years, where up to 30 per cent of colonies had been lost, the BBKA describe the losses as 'unacceptably' high.

A UN Environment Programme report published in 2010 found that pollinators are being harmed by factors including:

- **Habitat deterioration**
- **Agricultural practices**
- **Climate Change**

Results of pollinator research must be implemented

Now that the Insect Pollinators Initiative projects have been announced, it is crucial that any findings that may help protect bees are shared so that beekeepers and the public can act on them urgently.

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