



Bungay Community Bees Case Study

Introduction

Bungay Community Bees was officially launched in 2010, and provides 50 members with honey and the opportunity to become involved with the scheme. Working closely with Sustainable Bungay – a Transition Town initiative, the five core members work together with five committed volunteers on four apiary sites in Suffolk.

Getting Started

Inspiration for the CSA came from two people who wished to respond to the decline of the honey bee and other pollinators, in a larger and more educational way than solely keeping bees. Gemma Parker and Elinor McDowall of Sustainable Bungay – a Transition Town initiative – began the project with the aim of helping increase bees in the environment, to support those bees (and others) with appropriate planting and to raise awareness of their plight and positive ways in which to respond to it.

After an initial 5-year plan, (orchestrated with considerable help from Josiah Meldrum of Provenance and with interest and support from the Soil Association), the CSA officially launched in April 2010, roughly one year on from the initial idea.

During this time word was spread via the Sustainable Bungay media team who issued press releases, as well as by newspaper articles, local radio and local television. The project was also publicised on the Sustainable Bungay website and google-group.

Membership

There are approximately 50 members signed up to the CSA, who pay £20 each year for membership with no additional costs for produce. Membership fees are usually paid in January each year by cheque, electronic transfer or cash. The annual subscription helps fund the scheme's bees, equipment, beekeeper training and events. In return, members receive a share in any honey harvested and the opportunity to become as involved in the project as they want. There are currently three main strands – beekeeping, plants for bees and education and outreach.

Members consist of a wide range of individuals with varied levels of involvement, including education and outreach organisers and helpers, an events organiser, beekeepers, a hive builder/teacher, hive visit observers and apiary site owners. Individuals can play an active role in the decision making of the CSA through attending meetings, responding to email notifications and website blogs, and joining in discussions on the google-group forum. An end of year report is sent

out to all members to keep them fully informed of the activities and progress during the year.

Members are motivated by multiple aspects of the scheme including conservation, plants and related gardening/farming/wildspaces, honey, education and awareness raising, and re-skilling.

Land and Produce

The CSA has the use of four apiary sites and the offer of many more. It has not been necessary to rent any land because individuals have been keen to keep pollinators lodged on their land. All labour is done on a voluntary basis. Most of the work is done by the core group together with five regular helpers, all of whom aim to be as natural and chemical free as possible, and to promote organic gardening and growing practices. One (and ½) lead beekeepers are involved with the project, and regular bee inspections are carried out by Elinor.

Although it is still early days, there are plans to eventually diversify produce to include wax products as well as honey.

Funding and Admin

The group received money, equipment and bees via donations and subscriptions, which has been used for training, insurances, and equipment. Stickers have been purchased for bee-friendly plants at the garden centre and Bungay Community Bees leaflets have been printed. The team also organized 'Bungay Beehive', a day of talks, displays and activities. Nearly all of the £800 (approx) income this year has been spent on meeting the costs of the operation.

The CSA also received funding from the Adnams Charity to buy honey extraction equipment and jars. All funds are managed by the Sustainable Bungay bank (co-op) account.

The core group consists of about five individuals. It has developed fairly informally, but is in the process of becoming more structured in order to effectively form a basic plan for the future that can be used as a starting point for discussion with members.

Work on promotion / membership / finances / legal issues etc are looked after by Elinor, who has a secretarial role, Gemma as treasurer, and Charlotte Du Cann who covers promotion. The core group also consists of a beekeeping leader, a plants for bees leader, and an education and outreach leader.

As yet there is no legal structure for the project. Insurance covers Public Liability and Bee Disease.

Community Involvement

Bungay Beehive Day is an annual opportunity for members of the community to find out more about the project. The group also offer work with schools. Plans for the future include forming links with other beekeeping CSA projects such as Capital Bee and Norwich Community Bees. There are plans to work more closely

with growers and farmers, to extend links with other groups such as PAN UK, the Natural Beekeeping Trust and the Soil Association.

Achievements and obstacles

The CSA team see their main achievements as the successful implementation of several hives of bees, working with a school, awareness raising, speaking and attending London Bee Summit, inspiring other beekeeping CSA projects and the organisation of Bungay Beehive inspiration and education day.

The group has evolved to work more on bee-support activities than on pure beekeeping, and is dedicated to following the interests and passions of their members to develop the projects (plants, hive building, education/outreach etc).

Key problems we've faced during this initial phase of the project include getting subscriptions from members and communication issues within the core group. In addition, training people to become beekeepers that haven't actually taken the role up has wasted a huge amount of time and energy. And the lack of registration forms has not helped with signing up members. We're overcoming many of these problems now with formalising our group structure, using application forms and getting trainees to sign a written agreement.

The Bungay Community Bees team hope to see their work continue in the same manner in the future, with more honey produced, and with more bees being raised for them and others. They hope to work more with farmers and growers and with other Beekeeping CSA projects, and to create their own "river of flowers."

All the Bungay team agree on the multiple benefits of the scheme, in terms of helping to increase fruit and vegetable yields, contributing to a more balanced ecosystem and longer term sustainability, and by raising awareness of bees, food and pollination.

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