

It's time to save the 'sound of summer'

We've all got to 'save the sound of summer' by creating 'bumblebee feeding stations' in our gardens, as *Penny Bunting* explains.

VISITORS to Chesterfield over the last few weeks cannot have failed to notice a new addition in the churchyard of the town's world-famous Crooked Spire: a huge wooden bumblebee.

The oak sculpture – created by local sculptor Andrew Frost, who uses chainsaws to transform abandoned trees into works of art – was unveiled on April 30 by the town's then Mayor, Alexis Diouf.

The sculpture had been commissioned by Chesterfield Borough Council as a lasting legacy to celebrate the launch of the three-year Pollinating the Peak initiative – run by the Bumblebee Conservation Trust with Chatsworth, Chesterfield Borough Council, HSG UK, Little Green Space, Moors for the Future Partnership and Plain Green.

Pollinating the Peak is a major Peak District-based campaign to help bumblebees and other pollinators, and will involve communities in conservation and creating bee habitats.

So why all this buzz about bees – and what's it got to do with our gardens, I hear you ask. Well, for a start, they are quite endearing little creatures. If you've ever sat in a sunny meadow or garden, watching a bumblebee crawl in and out of the flowers on a foxglove, then you'll know what I mean.

Years ago they were also called 'humble bees' and even earlier, in some country dialects, they were known as 'dumbledores'. Sorry, Harry Potter fans, J.K. Rowling didn't invent the name after all!

Bumblebees are not everyone's cup of tea – they can sting, after all. But actually, unless seriously provoked, bumblebees are happiest just minding their own business.

Minding their own business consists mostly of looking for, and collecting, nectar and pollen – during which activity they perform the most useful and necessary function of pollinating a huge range of flowers, fruits and vegetables.

But sadly, of the UK's 24 bumblebee species, two – Short-haired bumblebee and Cullum's bumblebee – have become nationally extinct in the last 80 years, although the former is being reintroduced. Of the other species, seven are in decline, and 11 are of conservation importance.

"Bumblebees are in trouble. Their populations have crashed, with some species already extinct and others threatened. We want to raise awareness about these iconic insects and how we can all help save the sound of summer," says Gill Perkins, conservation manager of the Bumblebee Conservation Trust.

One major problem facing bees is



Top: The Common Carder Bee is sadly not as common as it once was. *Picture courtesy of the Moors for the Future Partnership.*

Above: There's no doubt about it – bees love lavender!



habitat loss. Since the Second World War, more than three million hectares – 98 per cent – of lowland meadow have been converted to intensive agriculture and urban development, or have simply been neglected.

Add to this the challenges faced by bees in the form of climate change, pathogens and increased use and toxicity of pesticides, and it's easy to understand why they're in trouble.

This is bad news for bees, of course – but it's not great news for us humans, either. We rely on the contribution of bumblebees to pollinate a range of commercial crops – strawberries, apples, tomatoes and peas, for example. Without these amazing insects helping out on UK farms and smallholdings, the cost of some fruit and vegetables could rocket, as farmers become forced to find less cost-effective means of

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pollination. So it makes sense to do all we can to help the humble bumblebee.

“One in three mouthfuls of our food is thanks to bees, and we can take action to help them – including by managing gardens and land in a pollinator-friendly way,” says Peter Corke, sustainability officer at Chesterfield Borough Council.

One of the best ways to help is to create a bumblebee feeding station in your garden. Planting a range of nectar-rich shrubs, perennials and annuals to offer a constant supply of nectar from early spring to late autumn will attract bumblebees – and all sorts of other wonderful pollinating insects, such as butterflies, honeybees and hoverflies – to your plot.

Different bumblebee species have tongues that are different lengths, and this affects the kinds of flowers they can visit for nectar – so plant a variety of different types to attract a variety of pollinators.



A White-Tailed Bumblebee Queen. Picture courtesy of the Bumblebee Conservation Trust.

Five great plants for bumblebees

LAVENDER is perhaps one of the most popular cottage garden plants, with lovely lilac flowers and wonderful, relaxing scent. Bees love it, and there's nothing like the sight of a bumblebee dangling upside down on a lavender flower to lift the spirits. Apple trees are great for bees. They feast on the blossom in spring, pollinating the trees as they buzz from one blossom to the next. 'Katy' is an excellent variety for the Peak District climate, or grow a Derbyshire heritage variety such as 'Newton Wonder'. Borage is easy to grow from seed and attracts bees, butterflies and hoverflies. It's a good herb to plant alongside vegetables, as the pollinating insects that are drawn to its delicate blue blooms will then go on to pollinate the runner beans! Dandelions may be just a common garden weed to us – but they are a feast for a bee. Dandelions start flowering in early spring, and continue right through to autumn, so are a readily available year-round food source for bees. Butterflies and hoverflies like them too, and goldfinches feed on the seeds. Scabious is a super little plant with



Top: Scabious keeps flowering all summer. It's Butterfly Blue variety attracts bees as well as (obviously) lots of colourful butterflies!

Above: A bumblebee feasting on apple blossom.

purple flowers that keep going right through summer. To attract colourful butterflies, such as painted ladies and red admirals, as well as bees, choose scabiosa 'Butterfly Blue' which flowers from July to October. ■

Gardens



Picking the right plants for your garden will attract other wonderful pollinating creatures, like this tortoiseshell butterfly.

Bumblebees are often the first insects to emerge after hibernation in early spring. Unlike honeybees, they don't keep a winter food store, so they're really ready for a snack when they wake up.

Early flowering nectar-rich plants like snowdrops, grape hyacinths and crocuses offer a tasty breakfast for bees. Honesty and mahonia also flower quite early in the year, so are useful choices for a bee-friendly garden.

Bumblebees adore old-fashioned cottage garden flowers – sweet peas,

hollyhocks and honeysuckle, for example – that are easy to grow and give striking splashes of colour in the garden. Many classic kitchen garden herbs such as rosemary, sage and chives will also attract pollinating insects.

Also include some later flowering perennials – Michaelmas daisies and sedums are good choices – and you'll provide insects with food for much of the year. Chose a sunny, sheltered site for your nectar garden, and it will soon be buzzing with beneficial insects.

Editor's Note: For more information about bumblebees and ideas for helping them, go to www.bumblebeeconservation.org. ■



There's a chance to go Plant Hunting at Carsington Water this month. ■

What's on this month

PLANT Hunters' Fairs return to Carsington Water on Sunday, July 26 with their latest plant fair. There will be a great line-up of 20 specialist nurseries and artisans from across the country, and entry is free.

It will be a great chance to pick up some late flowering plants to give your garden a boost, with nurseries specialising in plants of all sizes for sunny or shady positions. The plant fair will be held next to the Visitor Centre and will run from 10am until 4pm.

And on the weekend of July 18 and 19, between 1.30 and 5.30pm each day, the 'Secret Gardens of Winsters' will become a secret no longer!

There will be over 20 gardens to discover around the village, as well as plant and craft sales, an art exhibition, a children's 'Gnome Hunt', live jazz and home-made refreshments.

There will be a free Park and Ride service operating on both days. Tickets will cost £4 (admission free for accompanied children). ■

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