

National Trust Press Release

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Honey bees find richer diversity of pollen in urban areas

The first set of results from pollen which has been collected from National Trust beehives around the UK this summer indicate that bees foraging in urban locations are typically visiting a much wider range of flowers than those in rural areas.

Researchers based at the University of Worcester have been analysing samples of pollen from 10 of the 45 hives [1] involved in the Trust's and BBC Local Radio's 'Bee Part Of It' project to try and establish if there is any link between pollen and the health of the bees. This research was carried out between June and early August.

Professor John Newbury, from the National Pollen and Aerobiology Research Unit at the University of Worcester said: "So far we have been analysing the pollen pellets carried back to the hives by foraging bees. These provide a snap shot of what flowers the bees are feeding on at what time and where.

"This is important because different flowers can provide different levels of nutrition. We can also see if bees are feeding entirely on commercial crops which may make them more susceptible if there are any negative effects of agriculture sprays."

At Kensington Palace in London, where the Duke of Gloucester is keeping bee hives, the samples contained large amounts of pollen from rockrose, eucalyptus and elderberry.

In suburban sites, such as the University of Worcester, there was a lot of pollen from lily, blackberry and rowan trees, but also some from oilseed rape.

By contrast at some of the hives at rural National Trust locations, for example Nostell Priory in Yorkshire and Barrington Court in Somerset, the June samples were heavily dominated by oilseed rape with little other pollen types detectable.

At the end of the summer, honey samples will be analysed and these will provide a much broader picture of the plants visited during the summer season. The bees will then be left to hibernate over the winter before further analysis into their health is carried out next spring.

Matthew Oates, Nature Conservation Adviser at the National Trust said: "These are interesting early findings, seemingly backing what we've suspected for a while - namely that bees today often fare better in urban environments than in contemporary farmland.

"Apart from crops such as oil seed rape and field beans, there are precious few pollen sources around for bees and other insects in modern arable farmland, and surprisingly little in areas specialising in dairy, beef or sheep production. Bees generally, though, are doing well this year due to the fine weather."

By installing 45 bee hives at properties all around the UK, the National Trust is aiming to create new homes for up to two million honey bees. For more information on the project and to view the latest footage from our 'bee' cam, visit <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/beepartofit>

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Notes to editors:

[1] 40 bee hives are located at National Trust properties, with five at partner locations.

The National Trust is Europe's biggest conservation organisation and looks after special places across England, Wales and Northern Ireland for ever, for everyone. People and places are at the heart of everything it does. Over 3.8 million members and 61,000 volunteers help the Trust look after 300 historic houses and gardens, 1,100 kilometres of coastline and 250,000 hectares of open countryside. Find out more at: <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/>