

## Biodiversity Workshop 1.2.24

Report by Michael Hanley

### 1. Planting for Pollinators

Graham Jackson-Pitt (GJP, Land Recovery, Cumbria Wildlife Trust):

Discussed the Planting for Pollinators Project. The budget for this was £2.5 million. It has been mostly focused on West Cumbria and the project has been expanded to include Barrow and South Lakeland. The aim is to create pollinator habitats and to educate local people. There is a dedicated wild flower nursery in Carlisle which grows 100,000 wild flower plants every year. Dedicated pollinator education has been provided for local communities. Also there have been educational sessions in schools and projects to grow wild flowers. Work has been done with National Highways with the sowing of wild flower seeds on road sides. GJP showed before and after photos of verges with mainly wheat and grass plants and a year later lots of flowering wild plants.

Charlotte Rankin (CR, Pollinator Conservation Officer, Cumbria Wildlife Trust): We have been working across 19 conservation sites across Cumbria. We have been getting local communities involved. We also have been using local contractors for ground preparation. Every site has a site management plan. The sites are: community orchards, churchyards, road verges, parks and playing fields and street flowerbeds.

Community involvement is essential. Also schools have become involved. We have community planting days. 370 people have been involved. We have planted 19,000 wildflower plants, 10,000 bulbs and 34 kilograms of wild flower seed.

Cumbria Plan Bee Strategy: This has been developed by Cumbria Local Nature Partnership and Pollination Action Plan for Cumbria. There has been a long decline in pollinators and their associated habitats. There has been a 50% decline in the bee population in the last 50 years. One third of all food and drink requires pollination so this is very important. Loss of diversity is linked with climate change and affects mental health.

Future Projects: We are going to increase our work with communities and provide new green spaces. We will need volunteers to manage habitats. We will give increased support to schools and give advice to businesses.

Questions:

Michael Hanley (MH, L): Observed that since leaving the EU, the government has allowed beet farmers to use neonicotinoids to kill insect pests. These pesticides are extremely toxic to bees. In the EU they are never allowed. Are you lobbying the government to stop the use of these pesticides?

Also, bee-keepers are having ever more difficulty keeping their bees alive. In the last 10-15 years the varroa bee mite has come to Alston Moor and the big worry now is the Asian Hornet which has wiped out huge numbers of hives in France. There is a lot of interest in bees in Alston Moor and we would love to see you doing a bee day there.

CR: Acknowledged the importance of a total ban on neonicotinoid pesticides. She said that she had often come to Alston, where the rare upland bilberry bumblebee is quite common.

N Hughes (NH, LD): How do we allocate our sustainability grants?

N Wright (WAFC Officer): We are looking at this.

GJP: Discussed doing things with various communities in Eden. We need advice from councillors. We could go into communities to plant various areas. We would expect the locals to look after these sites longterm. Every site will have a management plan which could be looked after by the local community or parish council.

N McCall (NMC, LD): How do we identify sites?

GJP: Flower meadows, open grassland etc. We would go to the site and assess it.

P Bell (PB, LD): Talked about sites in her area. One area is below Beacon Edge. Also there is the woodland on Beacon Edge which might be suitable. Penrith Golf Club has rough areas and the cemetery might have good areas for planting wild flowers.

J Derbyshire (JD, LD): Where are you involved?

GJP: Cold Springs, there are not many sites yet. We haven't focused on this area (Eden Valley) before.

J Murray (JM, LD): Gardeners would like to know more about honeybees. Also about other pollinators such as hover flies.

NH: Parish Councils will have the local knowledge.

GJP: The more sites we have the longer it will take to get around all the sites.

NW: We can take this to our PAGs (Place Action Groups).

GJP: Discussed bee-lines. These are routes along valleys where pollinators can spread. There is one bee-line in the South Tyne Valley from Garrigill to Slaggyford.

Councillor: Talked about avoiding cutting grass.

GJP: The first metre of roadside has to be cut. If the councils cuts grass 8 times per year it is expensive, if twice, it's much cheaper.

MH: Discussed "No Mow May". We shouldn't start to cut grass until May-June.

GJP: Yes. We should wait until the plants have produced and distributed their seeds.

JD: There is often conflict in local communities between people who want everything ultra tidy and those who are okay about not cutting the grass so often.

G Simpkin (GS, LD): Have you thought about marketing your wild flowers?

GJP: We have. We do some external sales. We want to expand this to improve our finances.