

# SOS for Honey Bees

## Campaign Action

**URGENT**

### Calling for a bee action plan

*Following the huge success of SOS for Honey Bees, the NFWI is revisiting the campaign to ensure a sustainable future for bees. The government is consulting on a National Pollinator Strategy and we need your help to ensure the plan is as strong as it can be.*

#### **The campaign so far**

In 2009, WI members launched a major new campaign calling for investment into research on honey bee decline. The campaign was a huge success – not only in ensuring that honey bees were given a sufficient chunk of a £10 million dedicated pollinator research fund – but also in raising awareness about the plight of bees and the action needed to help them.

The WI's interest in pollinators is not simply limited to honey bee research. Pollinators play a key role in our countryside and landscape. NFWI mandates dating back to the early days of the WI movement highlight a range of key environmental issues from the preservation of wildflowers and areas of natural beauty, to the importance of ensuring the availability of land for agriculture, and appropriate planning regulations.

Having secured a number of successes with the SOS for Honey Bees campaign, activity on a national level was scaled back in late 2011. However, as with all recent key campaigns, members remained active in support of honey bees at community level and the NFWI has continued to monitor and input into developments around bee and honey bee health.

Since then, a number of organisations including Friends of the Earth have also launched campaigns on bee

decline. There has been progress at government level too: the Welsh Government has introduced an Action Plan for Pollinators, emphasising the need for better and more connected habitats to support managed and wild bees. This is an important first step in bringing together the actions needed to ensure bees in Wales are as well protected as possible.

#### ***But bees don't respect boundaries, and our bee population remains in crisis:***

- *Winter 2012/13 was the worst on record for colony death of honey bees.*
- *Our wild and solitary bees are disappearing at speed. Only eight of the 24 bumblebee species are now commonly found in the UK.*





Marylyn Haines Evans welcomes delegates to the Bee Summit

Photo Credit: Friends of the Earth

## **Protecting our pollinators**

### **So what's happening with bees now?**

At the start of 2013, bees were back on the agenda when the European Food Standards Agency found that certain neonicotinoids, a type of systemic pesticide, were likely to cause harm to bees. Advocating a precautionary approach, EU member states voted in favour of a two year moratorium on their use. Whilst this decision brought bee decline into sharp focus, it was also controversial, with a sharp polarisation between those in favour and those against the decision. The NFWI was concerned this could shift the debate from one of consensus on the need to tackle and reverse bee decline, to one of division – on the relative pros and cons of pesticides. Evidence demonstrates that the causes of bee decline are multi-faceted; reducing pesticides is very important, but tackling factors such as loss of habitat, disease and climate change is also critical to reverse the declines that we are seeing and ensure a long term future for bees.

### **A Bee Action Plan**

In an effort to reinvigorate the debate on bees the NFWI teamed up with Friends of the Earth last March to call for a Bee Action Plan to target the multiple and varying causes of bee decline. We held 'bee tea events' in Parliament to encourage MPs and Peers to get behind a Bee Action Plan. This culminated in a Bee Summit co-hosted with Waitrose and the Co-operative, and brought together farming unions, environmental organisations, retailers, chemical companies, beekeepers, conservationists and landowners. Environment Minister, Lord de Mauley, used the event to announce the government's commitment to take action to safeguard bees and other pollinators. In March this year, Defra published their draft 'Bee Action Plan'; the National Pollinator Strategy. This is a notable outcome for the campaign and a hugely positive step in ensuring that the right environment exists for preserving and protecting our bees in the long term.

**WI members across the country have been doing their bit for bees. Now we need to make sure the government knows the strength of feeling that exists too**

### **What next?**

We have worked hard to persuade Defra that we need a joined-up, comprehensive strategy if we are to tackle bee decline effectively. But more needs to be done; the strategy is good but it could be better. We know that WI members across the country have been doing their bit for bees. Now we need to make sure that the government knows the strength of feeling that exists too. The Plan is currently out for public consultation, providing a key opportunity to tell government what should be improved, as well as remind them that the WI and wider public are behind an ambitious pollinator strategy.



## **SOS FOR HONEY BEES** *- the resolution*

**“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.”**

***Hindon & Fonthill Bishop WI  
Wiltshire Federation 2009***

### **Why are bees important?**

- Bees play a role in the pollination of up to three quarters of global crops. Not only would our diet be very different without them, but key commodities such as cotton would also be in short supply.
- It is estimated that farmers could spend upward of £1.8 billion per year hand pollinating crops if they didn't have bees to help them.
- Bees help preserve the biodiversity of our green spaces and countryside; living near greenery has been shown to be beneficial to health and wellbeing.
- Without bees there'd be no honey! Raw honey is renowned for its antibacterial properties. Manuka honey has even been shown to kill MRSA microbes.



Mayfield Evening  
WI Carnival



Creating a buzz at Llanstephan WI carnival



Members visiting the Food and  
Environment Research Agency



Sparsholt WI  
with bee houses

## Ways to take action for bees!

With spring almost here and bees emerging from their winter hibernation, now's a great time to let politicians know the huge appetite amongst the public for a Bee Action Plan. We're asking WI members to once again show support for bees and create a real buzz about why bees are important.

- **Fill in our 'We need a Strong Bee Action Plan' postcard** and tell us why bees are important to you. We'll be presenting these to Bees Minister, Lord de Mauley to show the strength of feeling amongst WI members for real action to protect our bees. Please return to the NFWI by 30/4/14.
- **Input into the pollinator strategy.** Let Defra know why you think an Action Plan is important. The attached template letter has a list of key points to cover, outlining why you back bees. Amend it to suit you, and add in your personal experiences.
- **Publicise the Bee Action Plan through your local media.** Use the enclosed template press release to publicise the strategy locally and raise awareness of the plight of bees.
- **Host a bee tea and invite your local MP or AM along.** There are bee inspired recipes attached and you can use your bee tea as an opportunity to ask your MP to respond to the consultation too – or fill in a postcard! Adapt and use the enclosed template press release to generate local media interest and join up with Friends of the Earth and other local groups to get others in your community behind the campaign. WIs in Wales – invite your MP and AM along and encourage them to input to the plan with specific reference to Wales' experience.
- **Get bee friendly in your garden and green spaces.** WI members have already been working hard for bees by planting pollinator friendly plants, reducing pesticide use, and training as beekeepers! Keep doing your bit for bees and remember to let us – and the government – know what you're doing in order to demonstrate the public's commitment to pollinators.
- **Display our 'Back our Bees' poster** in your local shop, pub or library.
- **Tweet!** Use the hashtag #BeeActionPlan to get social media buzzing about bees.

## Template consultation response

Please use this template letter as a guide but remember personalised letters will be more effective.

### CONSULTATION RESPONSE

The consultation on the draft Bee Action Plan, the National Pollinator Strategy, was published on the 6th March 2014 and is available on the Government website at: [www.gov.uk/defra](http://www.gov.uk/defra). The consultation will be open for eight weeks until 2nd May 2014. The final NPS is due in June. The NFWI will be submitting an organisation-wide response but by contributing your own submission, you will also be able to provide a much more personal view, highlight some of the activities of WI members

and demonstrate the scale and breadth of support for a strong action plan. A template response is included below, please personalise this with your own experiences and examples and do let the Public Affairs team know if you would like a copy of our full response which will explore these issues in more depth.

*A word version of this document is available from the Public Affairs department*

[Insert date]

Dear Secretary of State

I am writing in response to the publication of the draft National Pollinator Strategy (NPS). First, I would like to say how pleased I am that the government has committed to firm action to safeguard bees and other pollinators; a clear strategy to challenge all causes of pollinator decline is critical if we are to tackle and reverse the decline in pollinator populations that we have seen in recent years.

*[Please tell Defra a little about your WI]* As you will be aware, the WI has a long been concerned about the plight of bees, particularly the honeybee, for which we have campaigned for increased research funding to better understand its decline. The WI has a longstanding commitment to achieving food security and protecting the natural environment, with mandates on the protection of wildflower habitats and our countryside reaching back to the 1930s. From a personal perspective... *[Please use this space to insert a paragraph about why bees are important to you. You might garden in a bee friendly way, own an allotment, have attended a talk by, or trained as, a bee keeper, or your interest might be the vital role bees play in pollinating the food you love!]*

The NPS rightly recognises the inherent value of bees for the natural environment and the production of food. In order to realise the ambitious vision it sets out it will need to go above and beyond existing initiatives, providing meaningful ways for all those with an interest to take action and build on existing evidence and lessons, such as those from Wales, where an action plan is already in place. Whilst the draft Strategy provides an important start point there remains room for improvement to the final version, due this summer.

**Delivery and implementation:** It is important that the NPS has sufficient powers and funding to provide genuine safeguards. To achieve its ambitions a cross-sector approach will be needed. While I welcome the strong role for civil society organisations and the collaborative approach set out in the NPS, relying too heavily on voluntary initiatives or on outside bodies without direct lines of accountability – at a time when funding cuts are being made to government bodies responsible for safeguarding the

environment – means that the government could well struggle to deliver the aspirational vision set out in the NPS.

**Impartiality:** I want to have confidence that the actions contained in the NPS will be carried out objectively. The Strategy appears to suggest a reliance on the pesticide industry and associated groups to develop research and evidence on the impact of pesticide use. Whilst many different groups will rightly play a role in delivering a successful action plan, the emphasis must be balanced.

**Co-ordinated:** The Strategy will need to seek and secure commitment from across government departments, as well as from local government, with a strong steer from Defra. It is not clear from the Strategy how Defra will achieve the necessary cross departmental 'buy-in' and I look forward to seeing how this will be realised in the final delivery plan.

**Furthermore, to ensure the NPS is successful, the Government should consider strengthening measures to:**

- ***Ensure farmers are adequately supported to help bees***  
With the farmed environment consisting of 70 per cent of the nation's countryside, farmers are vital to bees' survival. Many farmers are already doing great things to provide solutions for pollinators, but the draft remains unclear on how they will be helped to do more.
- ***Demonstrate how bees will be better protected from pesticides***  
The NPS provides an ideal opportunity to set out a clear framework to reduce the unnecessary use of pesticides. The development of more sustainable approaches and a comprehensive plan to reduce our reliance on pesticides will be particularly important as pesticide resistance increases and some larger farms move towards more intensive systems.
- ***Ensure sustainable development***  
The plan includes measures to deliver a step change in land management yet more clarity is needed on how the planning and development of land affects the habitats bees need and on how the current planning system can better plan for pollinators. The NPS presents an opportunity to work with other government departments and local authorities to emphasise the role that planners, developers and land users in general can and should be taking to protect pollinators through the sustainable development obligations outlined in the National Policy Planning Framework, using clear aims and targets.
- ***Deliver bee friendly communities***  
As a WI member who is passionate about bees, I am well aware of the important role that civil society can play in supporting bees. [Insert name] WI would be happy to promote the pollinator friendly initiatives of the NPS at community level. However, if we are to do this effectively, local authorities will need to play a much more active role in supporting bee friendly communities. I would like to see the NPS set out clear roles and targets for local authorities to enable bee friendly communities to become the norm, rather than the exception.

Thank you for talking the time to consider these concerns.  
Yours sincerely

[Insert name and WI]

TEMPLATE  
LOCAL  
PRESS  
RELEASE

[Insert date]

**PRESS RELEASE: XXX WI members take action for bees**

XX WI today welcomed the government's pledge to implement a Bee Action Plan, the National Pollinator Strategy and urged ministers to ensure that the Plan is as strong as possible.

The draft Strategy, launched on the 6th March 2014, has been published with the aim of addressing the multitude of problems bees are facing – from shrinking habitats to threats from pests and disease, extreme weather to the increased use of pesticides and other chemicals. The government is now consulting with the public on the content of the Strategy and the WI is calling on the government to implement a plan that is strong enough to reverse the recent declines we've seen and deliver long-term benefits for bees and other pollinators.

XX, President of XX WI, said:

"It's clear that our bees are in serious trouble. Last winter was the worst on record for honey bee colony loss, and several species of UK bumblebee are under threat too – two species are already extinct.

"Bees are responsible for pollinating up to three quarters of agricultural crops, and many of our wildflowers, as well as producing honey. Both our diet and vibrant countryside would look very different without bees.

"We know how passionately the public feel about bees and we're delighted that the government has listened and promised action to safeguard bees. The Bee Action Plan has the potential to go a long way in tackling some of these problems but we believe there is room to make the Plan even stronger. A joined-up approach that ensures the multiple threats to bees are tackled is critical. This means action on a wide range of fronts and in particular we would like to see the final Plan set out clear targets for local authorities and planners to ensure bee friendly communities become the norm, not the exception.

"We want as many people to respond to the consultation as possible to show the government the strength of commitment to the necessary change to make a real difference to bees"

For more details, please contact [insert contact name and telephone number of email address]

## Recipes

*Get inspired with these tried and tested recipes courtesy of the NFWI's Cookery committee. Watch out for other bee inspired recipes on the WI website.*

### Easy strawberry jam

*Soft fruits have such a short season – preserve their delicious flavours with this recipe.*

#### You will need:

- 1kg/2lb 2oz jam sugar with pectin (not preserving sugar)
- 2kg/4¼lb strawberries
- Juice of ½ lemon

#### Method:

- Put the sugar into a preserving pan
- Hull and pick through the strawberries, discarding any blemished fruit
- Put the fruit and lemon juice into the pan and stir gently, leave for 1 hr.
- Put the pan on a medium heat, bring to the boil and boil rapidly for 15 -18 mins, skimming off any scum as it appears
- Test for a set
- When ready, turn off the heat and leave to stand for

### Apple, Stilton and Thyme Bruschetta

Serves 6 as a starter/12 as canapés

Prep 10 mins

#### You will need:

- 2 small baguettes, cut into slices on the slant
- 1 eating apple, cox or other well flavoured
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 3 tbsp onion marmalade
- 75g blue stilton cheese, cubed
- ¾ tsp thyme, fresh
- ½ tsp chives, chopped
- Black pepper

#### Method:

- Peel, core and cube the apple place in a mixing bowl and mix with the lemon juice to prevent browning
- Mix the apple, stilton, thyme and chives with a good



15-20 mins to prevent the fruit rising in the jars

- Spoon into sterilised jars. Seal tightly with screw top lids while it is hot and label.

*Tip: There are a few golden rules for making jams, jellies and marmalades. See our top tips for the perfect jam on the WI website at: <http://www.thewi.org.uk/what-we-do/recipes/jams-and-other-preserves>*



shaking of black pepper

- Toast the bread
- Place a teaspoon of onion marmalade on each slice of toast
- Pile on the apple topping neatly and serve immediately