

Advice on Beekeeping & Attracting Pollinators in Churchyards

Why Keep Bees?

Beekeeping is a very rewarding hobby but also an essential one. In the UK alone, there are around 250 species of bee responsible for pollinating around 70% of the crops we depend on for food, but many species are in decline as a result of disease, habitat loss and land use changes. Keeping honey bees can help ensure that crops and wildflowers are pollinated, thus increasing our food security and helping to maintain the biodiversity of our beautiful country.

As Christians, we are very conscious of the importance of stewarding Gods creation, and beekeeping in churchyards is one way this can be done. More churches are placing hives in quiet areas of their churchyards both for stewardship and for the other benefits beekeeping brings. The Bees of Gods Acres Project in Norfolk utilise their hives not only for honey and beeswax, but also as educational tools and a source of income. St. Thomas's in Oxford also has a successful hive programme-www.oxford.anglican.org/causing-buzz-st-thomass/

Where to Start?

There are several things to consider before you begin your beekeeping journey. From the outset, it is important to consult experts- the Somerset Beekeeping Association can be found at www.somersetbeekeepers.org.uk. Unless you have a member of the congregation who is an experienced beekeeper, you will need to find a local beekeeper who would like to put their hive(s) on the church's land and who is willing to liaise with church staff and share knowledge with church members and the wider community. This person needs to be a member of the Somerset Beekeeping Association.

Here are some points to begin your discussion with your church and the beekeeper:

- **Location** - is there a quiet area in our churchyard that can be fenced off? Is it well away from any road or public footpaths?
- **Safety is paramount** - in constrained areas, fencing can be placed 2-3m from the hives but should be 2m high to ensure bees fly up and away from the hive. If you have more space, lower fencing can be placed at least 10m distant from the hives. If you fence off an area, how will you mow it? Will the person mowing need protective clothing?

- **Clear signage** - how will we inform the public that we have a beehive in the churchyard? This needs to be very clear to enable those with allergies to make informed decisions.
- **Talking to neighbours** - how will we engage in discussion with those living and working close to the hives? What information do they need?
- **Insurance** - does the beekeeper have insurance (they should do if they are a member of their local beekeepers' association)? Does the church need specialist insurance?
- **Training** - is the beekeeper willing to teach others and share his/her skills?
- **The right food** - do we have a good selection of bee-friendly flowers in our churchyard? Could we plant more?
- **Further opportunities** - how can we include the wider community? Are there educational opportunities? Can we encourage other species of bee too?

What Else Can We Do?

Consider the other pollinators- there are over 1,500 species of pollinators in the UK including butterflies, hoverflies and moths. Providing a habitat that attracts and nurtures them is also important, see www.nationalbeeunit.com

- Find out more about pollinators and register your project with B-Lines <https://www.buglife.org.uk/our-work/b-lines/>
- Consider installing 'bee totems' - homes for solitary bees. See www.pollenize.org.uk
- Bug hotels can be simply made from a pile of logs and some smaller materials like lengths of bamboo and straw <https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/give-nature-a-home-in-your-garden/garden-activities/build-a-bug-hotel/> Native wildflower species are important. Mixes suitable for the UK can be found at <https://britishwildflowermeadowseeds.co.uk/>
- Establish a mowing regime that benefits the pollinators and the plants; timing is everything. See <https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/resources/> for help and advice. Consider also how you will inform the public of changes you make to churchyard upkeep.
- Hold a 'bio blitz' to discover all of the species your churchyard is home to. This is an excellent community engagement opportunity. See <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/projects/bioblitz/> for further help.
- Sign up to EcoChurch- all of your hard work in cherishing Gods creation contributes to an award from EcoChurch and there are lots of ideas available at <https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk>. Our Diocese of Bath & Wells EcoChurch Group on Facebook is also a must for finding our events and advice https://www.facebook.com/groups/BWEcoChurch/?source_id=255204297853708

Lastly, do keep in touch with your progress! Contact: sara.jeffery@bathwells.anglican.org

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