

Implementing the Pollinator Plan

Case study # 1: Bee Garden at Moneypenny's Lock, Newry Canal

Group: Inland Waterways Association of Ireland Newry Portadown branch

Sector: Local Communities

County: Armagh

Introduction

Volunteers at the Newry Portadown branch of the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland (IWAI) are a tribute to the huge impact local community groups can have for pollinators. Starting in



Photo credit: Heather Crawford

September 2013, this IWAI volunteer group sought permission from the then Craigavon Borough Council to remove invasive species from land close to the lock house and to replace them with bee friendly plants. This group ultimately created a 'bee garden' at Moneypenny's Lock that provides pollinators with the food, shelter and safety they need to survive and thrive.

What's even more impressive is that the volunteers at Moneypenny's Lock were able to complete their pollinator project for surprisingly little cost. Friends and supporters were given lists of suitable plants and asked for donations of cuttings, root divisions and collected seeds from their gardens. Some

donations were planted immediately once ground was cleared while others were propagated by branch members in their greenhouses and polytunnels. This approach provided a wealth of free plants some of which are now, at three years old, large enough to be split up for use on other suitable canal bank sites. All the garden infrastructure (tubs, plant trainers, stepping stones, bird feeders and two ornamental beehives) were salvaged from skips and recycling centres.

The Lock was already a popular tourist attraction for those walking and cycling on the canal towpath, but recently visitors have been coming specifically to see the beautiful garden these volunteers have cultivated.

Lead volunteer Heather Crawford provides more insights from the group below.



Photo credit: Heather Crawford

What motivated you to help pollinators in your local community?

I remember the sound of summer in my grandmother's garden fifty years ago. On sunny days it seemed that the whole place was throbbing with the buzzing of bees while in recent years my own garden seemed so quiet in comparison. Quite by chance I was given Dave Goulson's book "A Sting in the Tale" and I think anybody reading his chapter on the life cycle of the bumblebee would be galvanised into action to help these incredibly important insects.

Invasive plant species are infesting so much of our countryside, particularly our waterways. The Bee Garden project was a way in which two good things could be done at once; the eradication of snowberry and laurel, and the planting of much needed pollen and nectar sources for bees.

Lessons learned/advice to other local communities

1) You don't need an environmental degree or horticultural training to start a pollinator project, only determination and enthusiasm.



Photo credit: Bruce Crawford

2) Planning is essential. Who owns the land? Where can you get insurance cover (essential when working on Council property)? Who will help with the work? Where can I get information?

3) Don't be too ambitious. Start with a small plot with the option of extending later. The bees won't mind.

4) Ask people for plant cuttings, root divisions and saved seeds from their gardens. Gardeners are generous and are unlikely to refuse when you explain your project. But remember, if your site is out in the countryside, only native species of plants should be used.

5) Don't worry too much about weeds. The bees don't mind, so neither should you. Just try not to let them take over.

6) Stepping stones through the garden help a lot. We used salvaged paving flags cut in four.

7) Take lots of photographs before work starts and while it continues. Share them with other volunteers and keep looking back at the improvements.

8) Expect setbacks. Plants may be stolen, volunteer numbers might decrease, and weeds will grow. Don't be disheartened. Plant more seeds!

9) Be prepared to stop work and chat to passers-by. Tell them what you're doing and why. Pass on information about bumblebees. I have found that people know very little of their life cycle.

10) We asked the Council to install a tap and we used a borrowed hose to water the garden. The sale of small bee-friendly plants propagated in yoghurt pots funded the installation of a second tap at the other end of the garden. With donated water pipe, two of our less plant knowledgeable volunteers completed the task in an afternoon. Try to find suitable jobs for everyone's capabilities.

11) Learn First Aid. Councils often run free courses and it's a useful skill to have.

12) Make workparties fun. Socialise! Bring deckchairs and have a tea break. Eat goodies!

Biggest challenges

Beneath the Bee Garden site is the septic tank for the lock house. At the end of the first year, after we had most of the garden planted, the septic tank blocked and a JCB was brought into the garden to excavate. The excavation reached the depth of twelve feet. In the space of a week a whole year's gardening was lost. Working with the excavator driver we were able to lift some of the plants and potted them up. Then I had the task of encouraging everyone to start all over again which, thankfully, they did.



Photo credit: Heather Crawford

Damage after the excavation: don't be disheartened by setbacks!



Photo credit: Billy Austin

was built into the fence and a surplus bench from another Council site was installed. Up until then there wasn't any proper seating for visitors.

Benefits to the local community:

- A renewed pride in Money Penny's Lock
- Interaction between volunteers and the public. More towpath users cross the canal bridge to see what is going on in the garden. There is an exchange of information about bumblebees and canal restoration.
- Dilapidated fencing around the site has been replaced by the Council at our request. An alcove

Future plans:

We want to continue to increase the variety of plants in the garden, especially the early flowering ones. We also hope to construct a bee hotel from discarded pallets. There have been suggestions by Council staff of a possible education programme for schools, based around the garden. Finally, we have recently expanded the site by developing a small Fruit Garden beside the Bee Garden to increase the variety of spring blossom for bumblebees.

Further information.

Bee Garden co-ordinates 54.398889 degrees N 6.413261 degrees W

Money Penny's Lock can only be reached by bicycle or on foot along the Newry canal towpath. Nearest access points are Knock Bridge or Portadown (Bann Boulevard).

For more information on the Newry Portadown branch IWAI go to www.newry.iwai.ie

For updates on canal restoration projects including the Bee Garden follow us on www.facebook.com/newry.portadown.canal

For the IWAI guided heritage walk install the Guidigo app and download the Newry Canal Towpath Tour.

Before restoration of the site at Moneypenny's Lock began



Photo credit: Heather Crawford

After transformation of the area into a pollinator-friendly garden



Photo credit: Billy Austin (left), Heather Crawford (right)