

Brighton & Hove's "Big Nature"



The Background

At the 1992 Earth Summit at Rio, Brazil the governments of the world recognized the value of biodiversity and formed the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). To date 193 signatory countries signed up to this convention to significantly slow the loss of species by 2010, whilst Europe took the bold step of halting (stopping) the loss of species by this time.

Unfortunately the rate of habitat destruction has carried on at an ever-increasing rate and annual species extinction is between 50 to 100 times

greater than that of the normal background rate. To heighten awareness of this plight the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki -Moon declared that 2010 would be the International Year of Biodiversity.

Brighton & Hove's "Big Nature" is the name given to a loose association of different organisations, including: Brighton & Hove City Council, Sussex Wildlife Trust, Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Sussex Branch of Butterfly Conservation and Dorothy Stringer Environmental Partnership, who have come together to deliver a series of biodiversity related events during 2010, the International Year of Biodiversity (IYB). The aim is to involve and inspire people with their local wildlife and Big Nature as a synonym for biodiversity is a concept easy for children to understand.

International Biodiversity Day Saturday 22nd May 2010.

"Big Nature" would like to invite the people of Le Havre to participate in a summer long bio-literacy campaign designed to encourage the citizens of both Le Havre and Brighton & Hove to find time to become familiar with the bees of their gardens and parks. This international project will be achieved by distributing 100,000 identification postcards to the public through schools, libraries and other government buildings, in both Le Havre and Brighton & Hove. 50,000 of the postcards will be written in French and the other half will be written in English (please see attached jpeg for an example). The launch of this project will take place simultaneously in Both cities on Saturday 22nd May 2010. The public and record their data on the bilingual website:

<http://www.bigbiodiversitycount.org.uk> which is currently under construction. The closing date for the final record will be 30 September 2010. Data will be stored at the Sussex Biological Record Centre (because we are unaware of any similar institution in France). Later articles will be written about the results and made available for each city to publish in their regular popular magazines.

Why is "Bee Aware" important to us?

If you were born during the 1950's you belong to the first generation of human beings to see the world population double during your own

lifespan, which is of course part of the exponential growth pattern currently happening to the human population.

Of course if you were born in the fifties, many of you will be coming up for retirement soon and will have had a pretty good life, if you lived in the west. As it currently stands 6.8 Billion people live on the planet and it is estimated that global human population will plateau at between 8 & 10 Billion by 2050. This is rather worrying when you consider that most young people know no other life than one of consumption, utilising natural resources at an ever-increasing rate.

Since around 68% of the worlds terrestrial ecosystems have already been damaged by human activity, and around 75% of our marine fisheries are unsustainably harvested, only a small proportion of the earths natural ecosystems remain intact. As we destroy more and more of the world's natural ecosystems so we also degrade the invisible environmental services that they supply, free of charge.

Ultimately this can lead to one of two possible scenarios. Either keystone species will become extinct and the planet will suffer ecosystem collapse and the sixth mass extinction or the earths biodiversity will become increasingly impoverished, so that when you travel from one part of the planet to another you will only ever see the same species of animal and plant, the weeds that can cope with what humans do to their environment.

So, one of the reasons why we are running the Bee Aware campaign is to encourage people to become interested in biodiversity, wildlife, to make them bio-literate because we believe that we all need to be as aware of our local biodiversity as stock brokers are aware of the stocks and shares on the stock exchange.

We hope that by looking people will become involved in the fascinatingly complex life histories of our local natural history. We hope that people will learn to value biodiversity.

Let me put it another way:

TRY NOT TO READ THESE WORDS. Of course this is a paradox - as soon as you have read them its too late, because you had to read the instruction to be able to realise you weren't meant to read them. If you can read it is impossible to look at any words with out comprehending their meaning.

So what if it was in some other language that you can't read, like Chinese? Then the information would be concealed until you became familiar with Chinese. Reading the natural world is pretty much the same thing, we have become so unattached from our local environment that we no longer have any real sense of how to read it.

Becoming familiar with local biodiversity is rather like learning to read. So, if you are new at this, the Bee Aware Campaign is like your first reading lesson. Your ABC to Biodiversity, if you like. If you can't, read how can you be adequately informed about what's happening in your world?

Of course it's also true that bees are very important species because of the essential pollination services they perform within the fabric of the earth's ecosystems. Not only do they pollinate the wildflowers but also many of our crops. Some Scientists consider bees to be potential Keystone species and that with out their contribution many ecosystems may begin to crumble.

So by identifying and recording bees we hope to make two gains:

- 1) increased knowledge about year on year changes in our local environment and
- 2) an increasingly bio-literate populace, a community that values the natural world more that it currently does."

If any further information is required please don't hesitate to contact Dr Dan Danahar.

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