

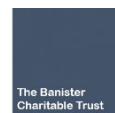
West Country Buzz Nature Recovery Networks Initiative

End of year report summary
April 2021 – March 2022

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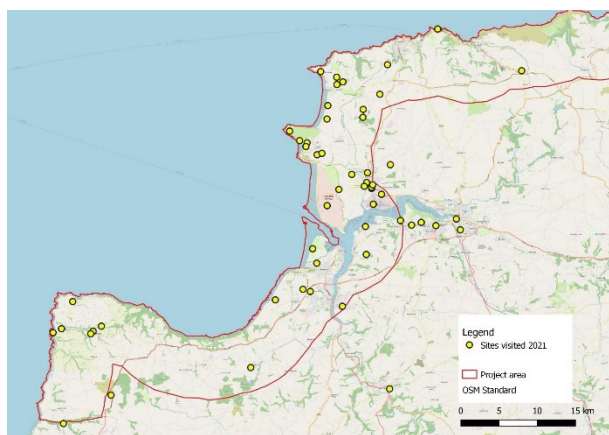
With thanks to our funders



Barbara Whatmore Charitable Trust,
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Background

Our project area is a 5km strip along the North Devon coast in which we are piloting an approach towards a Nature Recovery Network (NRN). We are focusing on the S41 priority species Brown-banded carder bee, Moss carder bee, and Ruderal bumblebee, whilst also benefiting a broad range of other pollinating insects. The NRN is being used to create, restore and join up pollinator habitat at a landscape scale, and integrates a wide variety of landowners, farmers, and organisations in the area. We continue to collaborate with 27 partner organisations, community groups and volunteers to deliver the project's objectives.



Sites visited in 2021, receiving habitat advice and management work

Project objectives

1. Survey and monitor: Establish the abundance and distribution of bumblebees, with a focus on S41 species.

We reached a total of 97 people through training events (an advanced bumblebee identification course, two outdoor refresher sessions, two follow-up field sessions, and a scything workshop).

A Big Bumblebee Blitz took place in August 2021, and targeted bumblebee surveys have been conducted across North Devon. **Brown-banded carder bees** were discovered at three new sites - at Ruda holiday park in Croyde, at Middleborough Hill and on Baggy Point. The **Moss carder bee** and Ruderal bumblebees were not recorded in the project area this year.

To measure the success of the Nature Recovery Network and the impact of

changes in management, **two case study sites are being monitored** using the Trust's national recording scheme, BeeWalk. Prior to the project, there was only one active BeeWalk transect in the vicinity of the project area. **In 2021, there were 22 active BeeWalks in and around the project area, which yielded 968 bumblebee records.** BeeWalk is now being used by organisations such as the National Trust and the Gaia Trust.

2. Advice and support: Raise awareness of what pollinators need to survive and thrive, with landowners, farmers and the general public.

Between April 2020 and March 2021, **55 sites were visited** (see map, left), which are **owned or managed by 46 landowners, and engaged with for management advice and support** (the target for site visits was 30). Of these, 22 sites were new to the project in 2020. **We advised on approximately 1,250 ha of land** (213 ha was land new to the project in 2021, 1,037 ha received ongoing advice for landowners already involved). This advice includes help with management plans and procurement of materials such as locally harvested seed.

Five talks were delivered, reaching a total audience of **90 people**. **Six articles** have been published.

Two farm days were attended by 9 people, run in collaboration with Branton Facilitation Fund Group and the National Trust.

Two guided walks and a meadows day event were attended by 45 people.

A Bumblebees and Flowers art competition engaged with local primary schools, with winners from each of the three categories receiving plants for their school grounds.

3. Habitat management: Increase the area of suitable habitat and habitat connectivity around existing populations of target species.

Between April 2021 and March 2022, **15.95 ha of habitat has been created** by direct intervention, restoration or due to improved management. This includes creating new areas of flower-rich grassland or enhancing

existing ones by oversowing, planting orchards, and changing grazing or cutting regimes to allow spring and summer flowering. The overall habitat target for the four-year project is 160 hectares to be restored, created or under improved

management for the target bumblebee species and other pollinators. **67.48 ha have been created since the start of the project** (14.12 in year 1, 27.4 in year 2, 10.01 in year 3, 15.95 in year 4).

Conclusions

- Despite a challenging year, we have achieved and even exceeded our targets for 2021/22.
- Progress has been made towards achieving our final hectare target of 160 ha. Of this, approximately 90 ha remains, although we have consistently exceeded our target number of landowner advisory visits and have also brought in substantial additional funding for equipment and seed to carry out habitat works. We also continue to collaborate with 27 partners. The shortfall has been caused by many factors including the long lead-in to make changes, time to alter long held beliefs/attitudes, and seasonality of habitat creation.
- A fifth and sixth year will help us meet and even exceed this final target, in part through providing support for a large scale grassland restoration project in development with the National Trust.
- One-to-one repeated visits are essential for planning, implementing and giving landowners the confidence and guidance needed to create positive land management changes.
- Building up a presence and reputation in the area takes time and needs a local scale focus.
- Targeted small-scale work inspires local action and ownership, leaving a lasting legacy.
- Using a flagship species to create resilient pollinator networks inspires people to get involved and helps create a story to capture interest. This interest has subsequently unlocked many opportunities, such as permission to survey, implementing habitat changes and getting people to volunteer and record bumblebees.
- It takes time to understand the project area - learning where the key sites are, finding contacts and resources, and reaching an agreement on management.
- Habitat creation work has a long lead-in time before it can be implemented.
- Whilst good progress has been made, species recovery takes longer than the lifetime of this 4-year pilot NRN project.



Left: Sowing Yellow rattle seed at Godborough Castle Reserve. Right: Brush harvesting from Branton Burrows with NT, to oversow at Woolacombe Warren.