

York Urban Buzz project update – February 2017

York is buzzing!

Andrew Cutts, Urban Buzz Officer for York, gives a personal perspective on what Urban Buzz means to him. He has been working in York for Buglife since February 2016 and is tasked with creating 25 hectares of pollinator friendly habitat across 100 'Buzzing Hotspots'. Urban Buzz is a national project active across 8 UK cities and is funded by Biffa Award.

2017 is our second and final year working on York Urban Buzz. We had a fantastic 2016 and this is mainly due to the help of over 1,500 amazing volunteers! Collectively, volunteers have contributed 4,614 hours of work creating/enhancing over 29 hectares (that's around the area of 29 football pitches) of land across the city. The current number of Buzzing Hotspots stands at 73 so we are well on the way to reaching our target of 100.



Glen Mosaic Garden - before and after Urban Buzz work © Chris Ferry

Moving back to my homeland of Yorkshire to work in nature conservation was a dream come true! For a start I was back where people understand my accent. I was also tasked with engaging people with the natural environment on their doorstep – something that I feel very passionate about. It is all too easy to think that wildlife lives out in the countryside. However, urban environments with the mosaic of gardens, parks, road verges, river corridors etc. can be a haven for wildlife with appropriate management.



Half term planting spring bulbs at Rowntree Park



Learning about insects on a 'Pollinator Prowl'

York has some fantastic open greenspaces but sometimes, dare I say it, they are a little too green. Urban Buzz has been bringing further colour into the city and thankfully all the people I have met are positive about the changes. Seeing children racing across a mown area of grass to reach the fringe of a newly created wildflower area was a particular highlight of the summer. There they stood or crouched, pointing, smiling, and sharing the delights of the vivid flowers and visiting insects. Having worked as a primary school teacher I feel it is particularly important for children to be involved and connected with nature. They are the guardians of the future so it has been great to work with a range of schools across this historic city.

The aim of Urban Buzz is to create further habitat suitable for pollinating insects including bees, butterflies, hoverflies, and beetles. Habitat creation has come so far in the form of planting 1,998 potted plants, 427 trees, 6,669 plug plants and over 77,000 bulbs

(including bulbs, corms, and rhizomes), as well as sowing nearly 21kg of seed. We have also built one bee bank and installed our first prototype bee hotel. Such changes provide foraging and nesting habitat for insect pollinators, as well as other organisms, and provide vibrant natural spaces that people can also enjoy. Consideration has been made for all life cycle stages including where eggs are laid, what the larvae will feed on, and where the adult insects will feed and reproduce. On top of all this, 22 people have been trained how to scythe so the wildflower areas may be maintained correctly into the future.



Corporate volunteers making a massive difference to pollinator habitats in Hull Road Park

A variety of sites have become Buzzing Hotspots. Larger sites include Hull Road Park, Knavesmire Road, and Millennium Bridge grassland. At the other end of the scale there are sites including Bar Convent Garden and Door 84 Youth Club. Some sites such as Glen Mosaic Garden received intensive ground work, whilst others only required a few additional plants for enhancement including the likes of Long Meadow in West Bank Park. Thanks goes to staff at City of York Council who have suggested Council owned sites, helped with habitat work, and are ensuring such sites thrive into the future.

Honeybees are often the first species mentioned when I visit people looking to help with the project. It's been great to raise awareness of the other 270+ species of bee living in Great Britain and Ireland along with the multitude of other amazing pollinating insects. Highlights for me include the 'Pollinator Prowl' and 'Pollinator Tea Party' events that we held in the summer. People ranging from 2 to 72 years old attended! We all enjoyed observing the behaviour of insects in meadows at St Nicks and Rawcliffe Country Park.

People of York have really taken ownership of the Urban Buzz project. I have loved working with the wide range of passionate and dedicated people who are making a positive difference for the populations and diversity of insect pollinators. I would like to give a heartfelt thanks to everyone who has helped us out along the journey so far. Whether you have suggested and surveyed sites, helped with the site creation, or helped spread the word, you have played a part. York Urban Buzz would not be as successful without all of your help. There is still plenty of work to be done in the next few months but with your continued support I believe we can surpass our targets!

I hope you enjoy 2017 from the very first Crocus and Snowdrop flowers right through to autumn when Ivy is in flower. Please let me know of pollinators you see visiting flowers and nesting in bee hotels!



Buzzing Hotspot designs at Park Grove Primary School



Bumblebee feeding by Millennium Bridge

Andrew Cutts, York Urban Buzz Conservation Officer, February 2017

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