

News from Shrinking the Footprint 6th Aug 2009

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For immediate release

Lambeth Palace bees buzz for miles

Get a buzz out of caring for creation, said David Shreeve, the Church of England's National Environment Adviser, after visiting Lambeth Palace's 12 hives, whose bees help London grow greener. The bees pollinate plants and flowers across a seven mile radius in the capital with each hive providing around 60lbs of honey a year. Wax from one hive has even been used to make a small model of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

David Shreeve made the visit after today's call from Conservation watchdog Natural England for more city dwellers to keep bees – he said this must be taken seriously as bees are a declining species but essential to the survival of plants and crops.

“Christians, and people of all faiths, have a duty to care for our creation, so we support Natural England's call to look out for our bees. Traditionally, bees are associated with rural life but the hives at Lambeth Palace show how bees can also thrive in inner cities – in this case only a stone's throw from Parliament. At Lambeth, with its great tradition of beekeeping, the Church is fortunate to own grounds providing a home for bees that keep London greener by pollinating plants as far as seven miles away.”

The Bishop of Chelmsford the Rt Revd John Gladwin who retires next month has kept bees for a number of years and has made his honey available to local hay fever sufferers. The theory is that as his bees collect pollen from local flowers, the honey they make carries immunity to hay fever.

Experts say that bees are under threat worldwide – particularly honeybees that are in danger of extinction without beekeepers to care for them in domestic environments. Natural England says that an increase in UK bee colonies could make the insects more resistant to the current killer diseases affecting the bees.

The watchdog is encouraging city dwellers to keep bees with a newly designed urban hive – the Beehaus - and is offering general advice while warning of the responsibilities involved. The first Beehaus will be installed on Natural England's office roof in Victoria, London, overlooking Westminster Cathedral. Dr Tom Tew, Chief Scientist for Natural England, said: ““The decline of our domesticated honey bee is worrying, but it's sometimes easy to forget that there are other pollinators, including more than 250 species of wild bees, that also need our help. The good news is that there's plenty that we can do in our gardens and churchyards by making a bit of space for nature and planting nectar-rich flowers.”

Notes for editors

Lambeth Palace bees are cared for by beekeeper Clea McIlraith

Pics available –

1. David Shreeve with Lambeth Palace Garden Manager Alistair Cook at the beehives
 2. Wax model of Archbishop based on a brass candlestick of St Ambrose
- www.shrinkingthefootprint.org The Church of England's national environmental campaign

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