

Britain boosts bumblebee battle

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British farmers are being paid about \$350 a year to help save bumblebees from extinction by planting a clover mixture at the edges of their fields.

Entomologists say Britain's bumblebee numbers have fallen to dangerously low levels, mainly because of the destruction of their habitats the BBC reported Wednesday.

The government-sponsored "Operation Bumblebee" is designed to increase the number of the 24 species of British bumblebees on 1,000 farms during the next three years.

Scientists estimate there are approximately 70 percent fewer bumblebees in Britain than there were 20 years ago -- mainly because farmers no longer leave areas of clover and legumes for the bees to feed on and live in.

The farmers are being paid to sow seeds that will attract the bees, which pollinate many crops including strawberries and oil seed rape.

British authorities are also warning gardeners to avoid modern hybrid plants, which are often sterile and not good for the bees. Instead, gardeners are urged to plant traditional species, such as lavender, rosemary, geraniums, foxglove and heathers.

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