

London bee tracking project begins

June 20 2016



The weather resistant tag on the bee's back will allow researchers from QMUL to keep track of it over the next month so they can uncover the secret lives of London's bees. Credit: Joseph Woodgate/QMUL

Hundreds of bees with individual coloured number tags will be released from the rooftops of Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) on Tuesday 21 June and over the next month for a project that hopes to

uncover the secret lives of London's bees.

Biologists from QMUL's School of Biological and Chemical Sciences will attach weather-resistant number tags on the backs of [bees](#), and encourage the public to identify them and take photos for a competition.

Prizes of £100 Amazon gift vouchers will be awarded for the best photo of a QMUL-tagged bee on a flower, for the highest number of QMUL-tagged bees spotted and for the best photo of a London bee-friendly garden (as judged by the research team).

The London Pollinator Project aims to understand the bees' preferred patches in London, in particular their favourite flowers, which reward them with nectar and pollen.

Five hundred bees will be released on Tuesday 21 June, and then several hundred more each week over the coming month as bee colonies mature.

Project leader Professor Lars Chittka, from the School of Biological and Chemical Sciences, said: "The fact that the bees have individual 'license plates' will allow anyone interested to develop their own science project, and ask scientific questions about the behaviour of bees.

"For example, citizen scientists might be intrigued to see the same bee return to their balcony and might record when during the day, how many times and which flowers they prefer. They may be curious about what these regular visits tell us about a bee's memory for places and why certain bees prefer particular colour flowers."

The project has already encouraged Londoners to plant flowers that are rich in nectar and pollen, like English lavender, viper's bugloss, or spiked speedwell. Once the bees are released the researchers will be able to see

how successful urban gardening efforts have been.

Professor Chittka added: "We hope that the observation of number-tagged bees in people's gardens will raise an appreciation of insects as individuals - with individual memories of a particular flower patch, and with individual preferences for certain flowers that differ from those of other bees.

"And once you view animals as individuals rather than anonymous entities, you develop a connection with them, and a deeper understanding of why it's important to assist with the conservation of threatened animals."

Provided by Queen Mary, University of London

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