Flowers planted in Cornish towns create buzzing hubs for pollinators

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Pollinator-friendly plants were added to sites across Cornwall, including here in Newquay. Credit: University of Exeter

Planting flowers in urban green spaces across Cornwall significantly boosted numbers of pollinating insects, new research shows.

The Making Space for Nature project, a collaboration between Cornwall Council, Cormac and the University of Exeter, transformed <u>urban green</u>

[spaces](#)—such as parks, small green spaces, road verges and closed churchyards—into welcoming community areas and wildlife havens.

Flowers, trees and shrubbery were planted across 78 hectares of urban green spaces in 15 Cornish towns—Bodmin, Falmouth, Hayle, Helston, Redruth, Camborne, Penzance, Pool, Launceston, Liskeard, Saltash, Newquay, Bude, Penryn and St Austell.

New [research](#), published in *Insect Conservation and Diversity* has shown that these green spaces have become buzzing hubs for pollinators.

University of Exeter scientists have found that wildflowers led to a two-fold increase in flower visits by certain pollinators (particularly solitary bees and solitary wasps) in these green spaces compared to places with no new planting.

Planting wildflowers and ornamental [flowers](#) together was especially effective at attracting hoverflies and other flies, with 3.5 times more of these than in areas planted with wildflowers alone.

"The Making Space for Nature scheme aimed to improve public green spaces for both people and pollinators," said Exeter Ph.D. student Oliver Poole, who led the study during an MSc in Conservation and Biodiversity.

"We studied 50 paired sites across 10 of these towns, which were either left as normal (mostly mown grass) or planted with wildflowers or a combination of wildflowers and non-native ornamental flowers.

"These didn't take up large areas—no more than 20% of space was used—but the results show urban green spaces can provide a vital refuge for pollinators, while also being appealing and enjoyable places for people."

The results—based on insect surveys of the sites—suggest some native wildflowers are particularly good for pollinators. These include common knapweed (Centaurea nigra), common hogweed (Heracleum sphondylium), cat's ear (Hypochaeris radicata) and oxeye daisy (Leucanthemum vulgare).

Some non-native ornamental plants were especially good at attracting pollinators other than bees. These included salvias, white meadowfoam (Limnanthes alba) and lavender cotton (Santolina chamaecyparissus).

Councilor Martyn Alvey, Portfolio holder for Environment and Climate Change at Cornwall Council, said, "The Making Space for Nature scheme has provided communities with access to nature as part of their everyday lives and created safe havens for wildlife.

"The spaces have been transformed into rich and diverse habitats, and working with the University has allowed the Council to evidence the value of these enhancements and the importance of creating them for pollinators."

Melissa Ralph CMLI, Cormac's Making Space for Nature Manager, said, "It's fantastic that University of Exeter research provides evidence that the new ornamental and wildflowers are helping reverse Cornwall's decline in insects.

"The new planting and Cormac's nature positive management methods clearly benefit both people and urban wildlife."