

Natural Capital Germany – TEEB DE case study

Berlin is buzzing!

Making city people aware of the value of bees

In cooperation with experienced beekeepers, the initiative “Let’s get Berlin buzzing! Bees as ambassadors of more nature in the city” sets up hives of honey bees at prominent locations in Germany’s capital, e.g. Berlin Cathedral, the Berlin House of Representatives or the House of World Cultures. The beekeepers introduce the building hosts, their employees and visitors to urban beekeeping. Various “Berlin is buzzing!” activities introduce city people to the world of wild bees and honey bees – thereby encouraging them to value the bees’ pollination services and motivating them to create bee-friendly habitats and support organic farming.

Location:

Berlin

Actors:

Citizens, Associations, Municipality

Project description:

What was the problem?

Parasites, diseases, pesticides and lack of suitable nutrition owing to the decline of flowering hedgerows and meadows in our (farmed) landscape cause problems for honey bees and wild bees, especially in rural areas. But in cities too, wild bees in particular suffer from surface sealing and not-very-natural green spaces, whether street greenery, parks or private gardens. Berlin’s 298 species of wild bee are on the retreat, and more than 40 per cent are on the Red List. For decades people have been drilled to be neat and tidy – and that includes green spaces: gravel gardens, short lawns and exotic, double-flowered ornamental shrubs yield hardly any nectar and pollen. But bees perform a valuable ecosystem service as pollinators of wild plants and crops. What’s more, this service is economically relevant: The German Beekeepers Association (Imkerbund) puts the economic output of bees in Germany at €2 billion.

So what can we do to promote this pollination service in Germany? How can we ensure that as many people as possible, including decision makers, are aware of the urgent need to maintain the diversity of species and ecosystems? Most people, and especially many journalists, regard words and concepts like “biodiversity conservation” as too complex and theoretical.

What solution was adopted?

"Berlin is buzzing" has found a way of using bees as ambassadors to get more than just the general public interested in bees. By providing accommodation for honey bees at their facilities, decision makers in cultural, academic, political, administrative, religious, industrial and educational circles are saying: "We value and acknowledge the great importance of bees to our city and to society as a whole." The initiative indicates the potential that individuals have within their sphere of influence to counteract the decline of the bees. "Berlin is buzzing! Why don't you get buzzing too?" is the friendly invitation. Since 2011 beehives have been set up and maintained at 18 official "Berlin is buzzing!" sites. This is done in cooperation with experienced Berlin beekeepers and the building hosts of the various institutions.

Marc-Wilhelm Kohfink is one of the beekeepers cooperating with the Berlin initiative. His family has been closely involved in beekeeping for over 100 years. Actually, Kohfink specialises in honey from Berlin and Brandenburg. In his new urban working environment he has a chance to mobilise city-dwellers' interest in nature and in bees as ecosystem service providers. In his shop and at special beekeeping courses, he informs his customers in Berlin about the usefulness of bees as pollinators, and also about the threats that honey bees and wild bees are exposed to in our country. "Many of them don't know that bees can live in a big city. This makes it all the more important to constantly point out that a big city is an ecosystem which provides many different services that people benefit from." In his shop he sells the city flower honey from a Berlin roof for €7 per kg. "When people are buying honey with a story they are prepared to pay a bit more for it. After all, the honey comes from their city. What's behind it? Berlin's bees."

What has been achieved?

The media interest was great. The large number of activities, the wealth of information and the initiative's multiplier approach succeeded in making city dwellers aware of the value of nature and the pollination services provided by bees. After some initial scepticism, none of the prominent buildings gave up their bees. On the contrary, there were inquiries from other institutions who wanted to get buzzing as well. In particular, the initiative reached "non-conservationists". In the very first year (2011) it was followed by "Frankfurt is buzzing!" at the request of the KfW banking group and "Munich is buzzing!" with Kulturhaus Gasteig. Since then the platform "Germany is buzzing!" has been established under the patronage of Daniela Schadt, the German President's partner. Here Hamburg will soon be joined by other city-specific campaigns to encourage more people to appreciate wild bees and honey bees. The initiative has established the value of pollination as an ecosystem service, and the economic benefit of "city honey" as a niche product has made the product more valuable in the eyes of the consumer.

Ecosystems:

Cities and urban landscapes

Ecosystem services:

Provisioning service:	food
Regulating service:	pollination
Cultural service:	recreation
Cultural service:	aesthetic pleasure

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More Information**Background information on "Berlin is buzzing"**

Corinna Hölzer, co-founder of the Foundation for Humans and the Environment (Stiftung für Mensch und Umwelt) had the idea for "Berlin is buzzing! Honey from prominent roofs of the capital" when she read a report on the stage builder of Opéra Garnier in Paris, Jean Pauton. The hobby-beekeeper secretly deposited a bee colony on the roof of the gorgeous Opéra Garnier due to private-organizational reasons - as short-term emergency solution before he wanted to bring the bees to a more rural area. He was surprised when the bees felt quite at home on the roof and got permission afterwards to keep several beehives there. Corinna Hölzer was amazed about the public interest in the bee-occupied opera and about the fact that beekeeping was even possible in the city. The new idea: Place bees on prominent roofs not based on self-interest but for the common good and reach managers and decision makers with tasty honey and friendly beekeepers! Conveying the topic "biological diversity" in an unusual manner became the vision of the initiative.

Project webpage: www.berlin-summt.de

„Natural Capital Germany – TEEB DE“ is the national follow-up project to the international TEEB initiative (The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity). It was commissioned by the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) with funding from the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB) in order to analyze the manifold values of nature and of the so called ecosystem services in Germany as well as the consequences of species loss also in economic terms and to make them visible. The project is coordinated at the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research (UFZ) within the period 2012-2015. More information can be found at: www.naturkapital-teeb.de
