Monitoring Your Pollinator Patch

Monitoring pollinators is a great way of finding out what's buzzing around your favourite local flower patches, whilst contributing valuable data to a national recording scheme. By counting the number of bees and other pollinators that visit flowers and submitting your results online, you can help experts to better understand the plight of pollinators and causes of declines.

How pollinator monitoring works

Flower-Insect Timed Counts (FIT Counts) is a simple but useful method of monitoring pollinators, which involves standing in a fixed location, watching a patch of flowers, and counting the different groups of pollinators and individuals that land on flowers within a specific area.

The counts focus on bumblebees, solitary bees, honeybees, wasps, hoverflies, other flies, butterflies and moths, beetles, small insects such as pollen beetles, and other insects. Using a quadrat to outline a 50 x 50cm area, record a tally of each pollinator you see landing on your chosen flowers within a 10 minute time frame. This method has been adopted by the National Pollinator Monitoring Scheme (PoMS) and is being used by volunteers across the UK.

Who can monitor pollinators?

Anyone with the time and passion to do so can monitor pollinators. You don't need to be an expert, nor have any surveying experience. All of the necessary guidance you will need is available online (see page four). Being familiar with the different pollinator groups and having a spare 15 minutes to complete the count qualifies you for monitoring pollinators.

Did you know...

You don't need to identify each pollinator you see to species, you only need to be able identify the group it belongs to e.g. solitary bee or hoverfly

Choosing your flower patch

Plants most suited for the FIT Count are common native plants known for their attractiveness to pollinators, species such as buttercups, dandelions, hawthorn, White-dead nettle, knapweeds and clover. Other plants can be used but it is important to note the name of plant. The ideal location to complete your FIT Count will be somewhere that has a large number of your chosen flower, either on their own or as part of a wildflower meadow or patch, placing the quadrat in an area with a good show of flowers.

When to conduct your FIT Count

FIT Counts can be conducted anytime between the beginning of April through to the end of September.

Conducting FIT Counts every month is a great way to practice your pollinator identification skills, and provides useful data covering the whole year.

Counts must be conducted when warm enough for pollinators to be on the wing, at least 15°C when mostly cloudy, and 13°C when sunny. Days with still conditions will produce better results than on windy days, and will be easier to identify your pollinators.

Top Tip

FIT Counts that are repeated throughout the year in the same location will produce the most valuable data.

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FIT Count resource list

1. Quadrat – this is a 50x50cm square used to define your chosen area. Quadrats can be made using a wide range of materials such as, wire, pipe, gaffer tape or even string.

2. Camera – to take a photo of your quadrat, chosen plant species, and where possible, any pollinators that you can't identify to a group.

3. A Pollinator Monitoring Scheme form, available here: https://www.ceh.ac.uk/sites/default/files/FIT%20Count%20survey%20form%20v3.pdf to capture all of the information in a format you can later transfer online

4. Pen or pencil - to record your findings.

5. Stop watch / alarm - to ensure you're surveying for 10 minutes - an alarm will help tell you when your count is complete.

6. An iRecord account - free and easy to setup, and is where all of the FIT Count data from your completed form can be inputted: https://www.brc.ac.uk/irecord/

Top Tip

For accurate data, try to only count each pollinator that lands on flowers within your quadrat once, being careful to not double count.

Pollinators to include in your count

Bumblebee

Other bee

Butterfly and moth

Beetle

Hoverfly

Fly

Wasp

Ladybird beetle

Conducting your FIT Count

Picking the right day

Choose a day that has favourable weather conditions. Still, warm / sunny conditions are preferred by pollinators, and will produce better results.

At your chosen patch

Select your chosen flower patch, noting the location, time and weather conditions. Place the quadrat over the chosen area of plants that are in flower. Take a photo of the quadrat and any plants inside

Start the 10-minute count, recording a tally of every individual that lands in your patch.

Recording

Have a copy of your pollinator monitoring form and pen with you to record your findings, as well a quadrat to help define your chosen area.

Use the PoMS recording sheet to tally the insect groups that you see. Input the data onto iRecord, along with photos of flowers and pollinators seen within the quadrat during your count.

Useful links

Guides to pollinators:
https://www.buglife.org.uk/sites/default/files/Pollinator%20identification%20chart.pdf
https://www.ceh.ac.uk/sites/default/files/FIT%20Count%20insect%20guide%20v3.pdf

Guide to choosing plants:
https://www.ceh.ac.uk/sites/default/files/FIT%20Count%20flower%20guide%20v3.pdf

Further advice and guidance on the PoMS:
https://www.ceh.ac.uk/our-science/projects/pollinator-monitoring

Check our other guides on helping pollinators in urban environments here:

www.buglife.org.uk

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