

Bioenergy funding

16 October 2009 Last Updated on 03 January 2010 Adam Owen

Bioenergy funding available

The Department of Energy & Climate Change has announced that a new round of the Bioenergy Infrastructure Scheme will be shortly available. The funding will be for capital bioenergy supply chain projects and the money will need to be spent by 31st March 2010.

More details will be forthcoming from DECC but for information about the previous round see the [Biomass Energy Centre](#) website.



Bring the buzz back to gardens and rooftops

07 October 2009 Adam Owen

A new, contemporary beehive for the urban beekeeper, has been recently launched by Omlet with support from Natural England, will make it easy for anyone - from amateurs to seasoned apiarists - to help bees find a home in urban gardens up and down the country.

The strikingly designed hive - called the 'Beehaus' - is developed with the help of leading beekeepers to be a 21st century home for bees and has urban spaces very much in mind. Beehaus has twice the room of a traditional hive (measuring about 1m wide and 0.5m high) and with



plenty of space for the colony to grow, the likelihood of the bees swarming is greatly reduced. Bees will travel up to 3 miles to collect nectar, so even the most unpromising gardens can still support viable colonies and produce their own honey. With proper care and access to local sources of nectar it's quite possible to collect over 20kg of honey from a Beehaus hive in a good year.

Omlet co-founder James Tuthill said "Bees provide a wonderful service pollinating plants and providing us with honey. The Beehaus™ is a brilliant new way to keep bees in a garden or even on a rooftop. Its new design simplifies the principles of beekeeping so that anyone can enjoy this fascinating hobby. With the help of urban gardeners, bees can have access to a wonderfully diverse source of plants, resulting in fantastic flavorsome honey."

The first Beehaus was be installed on Natural England's office roof in Victoria, London, overlooking Westminster Cathedral. Dr Tom Tew, Chief Scientist for Natural England, said:

"Bees provide us with honey but also play a vital role in pollinating plants - from farmland crops to trees, flowers and garden vegetables - bringing critical benefits to people and to the natural environment. We need to recognise that, if we want plants to flourish, we need healthy populations of insects to sustain them. "There is no reason why our towns and cities should exist as wildlife deserts - wildlife can thrive when we design our urban areas with nature in mind and the Beehaus is a great example of how easy it is for anyone to bring the natural world closer to their doorstep."

The Beehaus is 1m long, 0.9m high and 0.5m wide. The complete Beehaus™ kit is available to order from £495 online at www.omlet.co.uk or by calling 0845 450 2056

More bee news



A project to re-introduce the short-haired bumblebee to England was announced today in June by Natural England, the Bumblebee Conservation Trust (BBCT), RSPB and Hymettus. The short-haired bumblebee became extinct in England in 2000, but for over a century a small number of the original English

population has clung on in New Zealand, having been transported there in the late nineteenth century to pollinate crops of red clover. The bees were shipped aboard the first refrigerated lamb boats, and established small populations on the south island of New Zealand, but there they remain unprotected and under threat.

The international rescue mission has two aims - to restore habitat in England, thereby giving existing bees a boost; and to bring the short-haired bumblebee home where it can be protected. The project hinges on the creation of healthy bumblebee habitat with the help of farmers in South East England, many of whom are already taking part in schemes to support the pollinating powers of bumblebees.

The Majesty Oak

06 October 2009 Last Updated on 06 October 2009 Dave Pope

On the first week of August 2009 Majesty, the UK's joint largest oak tree, lost a very large limb which resulted in the loss of almost a third of the total canopy.



This tree is in the Fredville Estate, Nonnington, Kent. I took this photograph a couple of years ago and in my opinion this is (or was) Britain's finest oak tree. Text © Dave Pope

The tree was being visited by Dutch big tree enthusiast Jeroen Philippona who discovered the loss of the branch whilst talking to Park Keeper Mr. Peter Clarke.

'This oak is often considered to be the most impressive oak of Great Britain. It has a huge big bole of 12.35 m circumference at breast height, surpassed a bit only by 5 living British oaks, but these are all much shorter, with a less sound trunk and a less complete crown. A concurrent is the Kings Oak of Hazlegrove, which is somewhat taller but less bulky. The trunk seems to be sound from the south side, but at the north side a large hole shows the tree is totally hollow. This oak was described and named already in the beginning of the 19th century, together with two neighbour oaks, Beauty and Stately.' Text ©

Jeroen Philippona

Photo: © Dave Pope

Climbing the Redwoods

05 October 2009 Last Updated on 05 October 2009 Adam Owen

The National Geographic is an international ambassador for photography. Ever wondered how they get those incredible shots? The following weblink shows a short (6.24mins) video of how they do it. Well worth a watch...



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[National Geographic - Redwoods](#)

Meeting India's tree planting guru

22 September 2009 Amarnath Tewary

Saturday, 19 September 2009

Mr Raju is single-handedly organising the re-forestation of his state (All pics: Prashant Ravi)

An Indian civil servant, SM Raju, has come up with a novel way of providing employment to millions of poor in the eastern state of Bihar.

His campaign to encourage people to plant trees effectively addresses two burning issues of the world: global warming and shrinking job opportunities.



Evidence of Mr Raju's success could clearly be seen on 30 August, when he organised 300,000 villagers from over 7,500 villages in northern Bihar to engage in a mass tree planting ceremony.

In doing so the agriculture graduate from Bangalore has provided "sustainable employment" to people living below the poverty line in Bihar.

'Lack of awareness'

Mr Raju has linked his "social forestry" programme to the central government's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) which is also designed to provide employment to poor people.

I told the villagers that they would get 100 days employment in a year simply by planting trees and protecting them

Under NREGA - initiated in February 2006 as the government's most ambitious employment generation scheme for poor people - the authorities are bound by law to provide a minimum of 100 days of employment a year to members of families living below the poverty line.

About 44% of Bihar's population fall into this category.

"The scheme has brought benefits to thousands of families since its implementation," said a recent International Labour Organisation report.

But Mr Raju says that Bihar - being the poorest and most lawless state of India - has not been able to spend the allocated NREGA funds.

"This is because of a lack of awareness among officials about the scheme," he said.

The poor monsoon this year has led to lower agricultural outputs, while flash floods in some northern districts has made the situation even worse, he said.

"So the idea struck to my mind, why not involve families below the poverty line in social forestry and give them employment under this scheme for 100 days?"

"Under the scheme, each family can earn a minimum of 10,200 rupees (\$210)."

Target

The civil servant immediately made a blueprint of his idea and got the support of senior state officials.



In June Mr Raju released a comprehensive booklet of "dos and don'ts" and distributed it to village heads and district officials.

His initiative meant that NREGA funds were fully utilised - in the past this has not always been the case.

"I told the villagers that they would get 100 days employment in a year simply by planting trees and protecting them. The old, handicapped and widows would be given preference," he explained.

Every village council has now been given a target of planting 50,000 saplings - a group of four families has to plant 200 seedlings and they must protect them for three years till the plants grow more sturdy.

"They would get the full payment if they can ensure the survival of 90% of the plants under their care. For a 75-80% survival rate, they will be paid only half the wage. If the survival rate is less than 75%, the families in the group will be replaced," the guidelines say.

Under NREGA rules, each worker has to be paid 100 rupees (\$2) per day for 100 days in a year.

Increase in funds

Mr Raju even came close to planting one billion saplings on a single day.

The scheme has become a huge success

"I started preparing for this and motivating villagers by announcing the date as 30 August," he said.

"The target for every village panchayat (council) was to plant 6,000 saplings from 6am to 6pm to achieve the target of one billion. At the end of the day, we found out that we were just just short of the target, but it was still a world record," the beaming civil servant said.

Significantly, his scheme has even stopped the migration of poor labourers from the area in search of employment elsewhere during monsoon time.

"We never thought we would get employment for planting trees and protecting them," said Paigambarpur village head Indra Bhusan, whose community - like many others - planted over 30,000 saplings mostly on both flanks of the 14km embankment which criss-crosses their village.

The saplings planted are both fruit and non-fruit trees. The non-fruit seedlings have been planted on the banks of the embankment and on state and national highways - while fruit bearing trees are planted inside the villages.

This year the central government has given more money to the scheme.

Meanwhile, the Bihar civil servant is busy collecting the facts and figures to get his feat listed by Guinness World Records.

"Bihar has edged out Pakistan from the record book," he said flashing a confident smile.

"Its all become possible due to villagers. I owe them a lot."

Urban trees mauled

11 August 2009 Last Updated on 14 August 2009 Adam Owen

Thousands of urban trees mauled and destroyed as 'weapon dog' owners train animals for fighting

guardian.co.uk

Patrick Barkham



Photograph: Yvonne Hemsey/Getty Images

There are now more pitbull-type dogs in the UK than in 1991, despite them being outlawed.
Photograph: Yvonne Hemsey/Getty Images

Thousands of parkland trees across the country are being mauled and destroyed by pitbulls, bull terriers and other "weapon dogs", goaded by their owners to attack trunks, hang from branches and bite off tree bark, experts warn.

Dogs have savaged trees in green spaces from Peckham to Battersea park, Hampstead and Barnet in London, and other cities including Bristol, Manchester and Liverpool.

The attacks strengthen the jaws of fighting dogs, as well as building up their jumping and shoulder strength. The RSPCA received 24 reports of dog fighting in 2004 but that soared to 358 in 2007. According to the RSPCA, there are now more pitbull-type dogs in the UK than in 1991, when they were outlawed by the Dangerous Dogs Act.

"After the government's crackdown on knives, young people are adopting aggressive dogs as a fashion statement or offensive weapon and they are setting them on trees to strengthen their jaws or have them hang off branches," said Greg Foxsmith, an Islington councillor responsible

for parks, including one – Laycock Street – where more than 80% of exposed trees have suffered what appears to be dog damage. On one housing estate in Peckham, more than half of its semi-mature trees have been killed by dogs.

A spokesman for Liverpool city council said dog attacks on trees were "widespread".

A Manchester city council source said dogs destroying trees was "a major problem" in the city. In Bristol, there have been more than 20 dog attacks on trees in the past year, with terriers being hung from branches in St George park and dogs attacking the stems of young trees on the Blaise Castle estate.

Few perpetrators are prosecuted. In Barnet, a 22-year-old man was arrested last month on suspicion of criminal damage after £10,000 of dog damage to trees in Oak Hill park. But earlier this year, Paulo Poire, 27, was fined just £60 after he pleaded guilty to breaching Battersea park's bylaws by inciting his staffordshire bull terrier to bite tree branches.



According to a Barnet councillor, Andrew Harper, it is not just youths but also dog breeders who incite their animals to destroy trees. "Pitbulls are being trained up for fighting and these dogs are being encouraged to hone their aggressive instincts on trees. It is a very stark version of antisocial behaviour which we are trying to deal with," he said.

Many newly planted trees have been completely destroyed, but mature trees can swiftly succumb to fungal diseases once their bark is damaged. London boroughs have lost mature trees worth £10,000 each to dog attacks, according to Oliver Stutter, chair of the London Tree Officers Association. "It is remarkable how it is increasing year on year," he said.

Many councils are shielding tree trunks with wire cages, but the protection is unsightly and expensive.

Photograph: Ben Rose

"It's a problem with the dogs and the people who own them, not the tree," said Andy Tipping, tree officer for Barnet. "You can't wrap them all up in cotton wool and hope no one ever damages them. We need to send a message that if people do it they will get their dogs taken away from them."

Councils are being forced to try inventive ways of protecting trees. According to Stutter, one of the best methods to deter dog attacks is to surround trees with deep mulch. "People with expensive white trainers don't like getting them dirty. We've got to think outside the box, but

mostly it is about enforcement and giving park wardens the power to be able to deal with it," he said.

In Liverpool, the council is planning to deploy non-toxic chemicals on tree trunks which are unattractive to dogs. Islington council has made monitoring dog attacks on trees a neighbourhood policing priority and is holding events in parks to help educate young dog owners.

Foxsmith called on the government to reintroduce dog licensing for some breeds. "We should be looking at reintroducing some kind of licence or chipping to get a sense of ownership and responsibility over our problem breeds," he said.

Kit Malthouse, the deputy mayor for policing, said the Metropolitan police had established a unit to tackle the "horrific" problem of weapon dogs. "The practice of using trees in some of our park areas to train these unfortunate animals to become deadly weapons is appalling," he said.