

Progress Report: Caring For Life – Apiary Project

Prepared For: The Nineveh Charitable Trust

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Introduction



We are enormously grateful to the Trustees of The Nineveh Charitable Trust for their support of our developing Apiary project over the past twelve months.

Over the past year, we have been encouraged at the way in which our social enterprises; the Granary Restaurant, Farm Shop and Horticultural Nurseries, are continuing to build up.

However, as the majority of Caring For Life's income continues to come from the Trust's support base of individuals and churches, we are also seeking to nurture and expand that support base, which is so crucial to the charity on into the future.

In the meantime, we are so very thankful to our supporters and the generosity of grant making bodies and we are therefore sincerely grateful to the Trustees of The Nineveh Charitable Trust for their kind support, in helping us to develop a new Apiary project, within our Horticultural project and Conservation facilities.

Caring For Life continues to help vulnerable and hurting people through a comprehensive support network, which now includes:

- 'Being There' Housing Support Project – At any time, 160 - 250 people of all ages are supported in independent living
- Supported homes – 16 individuals
- 15 Therapeutic Daytime activities on the Trust's farm – 172 attend each week.

The Apiary Project – a new venture

In 2015, a new project within Horticulture, the Apiary Project was introduced, to enhance therapeutic and educational opportunities for project attendees, but also to benefit the advancement of biodiversity within the Conservation facility.



The Apiary Project took off with the purchase of a hive and initial nucleus of bees in June 2015. With the added provision of protective clothing and hive tools and the support of a beekeeping volunteer we began to learn how to look after these remarkable creatures. We successfully overwintered this colony (an achievement which eluded many more experienced beekeepers this last winter) and found its situation amongst our 6-acre conservation area ideal for its growth and development. It grew to such an extent that it swarmed twice in 2016 the second of which we were able to capture and establish in a spare hive.

Following the provision of funds over the past 2 years, including the kind grant from The Nineveh Charitable Trust, these two colonies were supplemented with three more hives each with a new nucleus of bees. We learnt a great deal in the first 2 years about the craft of beekeeping from feeding and colony development to bee physiology and swarm control techniques.

Perhaps the greatest benefit has been the impact working with the bees has had upon the beneficiary most involved in their welfare. Bob has been through a difficult few years and the bees (and the responsibility for their welfare) has been a constant stable point throughout these years. He has often only made the effort to leave the house because of the next task required on the bee project. The bees have also provided him with a calming and engaging activity in contrast to the stresses and worries that occupy his mind whilst away from here.

Despite the ups and downs of colony numbers we are now far better equipped for the future. Jake, Project leader, completed his Basic Assessment qualification with the BBKA, which required practical manipulation of a colony and oral questions on a wide variety of beekeeping husbandry topics. We have also made a number of improvements to the apiary site including weed removal, the installation of a new secure gate and fencing and started planting a holly hedge around the perimeter.



In summer 2017, we harvested our first lot of honey (seen here above left and right), which was the cause of great excitement for those involved!

Those members of the horticulture project not directly involved in hive management have also taken a keen interest.

In particular beekeeping has been a catalyst to discuss pollination, flower biology and the interdependence of native flora and fauna. We have begun planning which bee friendly plants we can propagate to enrich the site here and provide valuable year round forage for our bee colonies.

Conclusion

Although we lost 2 of our hives over the winter because the queen died, the Apiary Project is well established now with five colonies of bees, also with the knowledge that has been acquired over the past three years and the first harvesting of honey in summer 2017.

Our future hope is that as the bees continue to forage on site that this will be beneficial to all aspects of our fruit and vegetable production as well as to the development of wildlife conservation. It is also wonderful to be able to continue to harvest honey to sell in our Farm Shop!



It is a tremendous joy to see the enthusiasm of project beneficiaries as they learn about the ecological importance of bees and as they learn to care for them.

We do sincerely thank the Trustees of The Nineveh Charitable Trust for their kind support, in helping toward the development of the project, including the purchase of equipment needed to develop the project through the production of honey, and we look forward to its further development over the coming years.

(Left – our very own honey!)