



Land in hand in municipalities

Step by step towards more floral diversity

A diverse supply of blossoms, evenly spread throughout the year to the greatest possible extent, is what every beekeeper is likely to desire for his bees. Getting closer to this objective can be achieved via the own municipality, by managing land in hand – that is available almost everywhere – in an ecologically meaningful manner.

Land in hand is defined as open space areas in agricultural landscapes and residential areas neither used by agriculture nor nature conservation. These areas include waysides, road embankments, traffic refuges and greens as well as dams along waterways and railway lines. Offering habitats for blooming plants, these areas can be specifically enhanced by seeding flowering seed mixes, adapting mowing intervals, depleting nutrient stocks in the soil and planting melliferous groves. Which steps are recommended to start a “land in hand project”?

Initiators wanted

Municipalities are at the core of the project. Impulses can thus be given by anyone, a citizen, a beekeeper, a farmer, a local nature conservation organisation, the mayor or the municipal council – personal engagement being the best possible basis. Perhaps some efforts at persuasion will be needed, but in general great willingness to ecologically enhance the own living environment can be found in many municipalities. That is because many people realise that suitable habitats for pollinating insects such as honeybees and wild bees become increasingly scarce in our agricultural landscapes, pollination being a valuable asset that we cannot afford to do without.

Establishing a solid basis for planning

Any land in hand project will have to be based on the analysis of local circumstances. How many areas with



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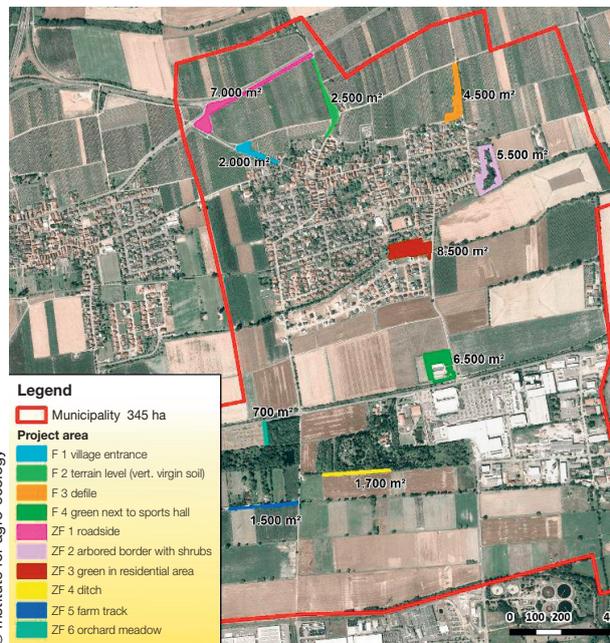
Staggered mowing ensures supply of blossoms

a potential for enhancement are available? What is the size of these areas and what does the spatial distribution look like? Who is the owner, and who is responsible?

Municipalities in Germany, for example, have land registers available which provide information on land tenure. In addition, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) provide useful planning data. Following the identification of potential areas, on-site inspections will clarify where enhancement measures could make sense.

That is why individual protection targets must clearly be defined. Does a measure aim at promoting a diverse supply of blossoms and thus melliferous plants for bees only? Or should breeding habitats of wild bees also be protected? Do identified areas also serve as habitats for endangered species which are of special interest to nature conservation? According to identified protection objectives, corresponding experts should be involved.

That, at the latest, is when cost issues are raised. However, there is no standard answer. When looking at a “small solution” for example, only mowing dates may be adapted to maintain the supply of blossoms, and this measure does not cause any additional cost whereas a “big solution” may also include new seeding and / or planting – and there are quite different nuances in between. It is important, however, to achieve clear



Overview of project areas in the model municipality Bornheim (Palatinate, Germany)

commitments on these issues in the planning phase prior to the start of the project. Who will be in charge of which tasks, and which are the deadlines?

Talking is golden

In order to achieve the broadest possible support for a land in hand project in a municipality, communication is key. An article in the municipal newsletter or a press release to the local newspaper or a presentation in the community hall are just some examples for available opportunities. A joint field trip to the land in hand areas, with the beekeeper who can contribute his perspectives and expectations, with a representative of nature conservation or biotope management, with a land owner or a representative of the municipality, will foster mutual understanding.

Setting up alliances

Project planning is no solo: Mayor and municipal council should be involved at an early stage. Nature conservation authorities, municipal building yard, farmers, possibly forest authorities and of course landowners must equally be involved. Sometimes, cross-linking with other ongoing projects can be helpful. This could also result in additional contacts to experts and potential sponsors.

Such activities do not necessarily cost a lot of efforts. As a matter of fact, only some efforts and mainly engagement are needed prior to the launch of a project. However, experience has shown that the objectives of the project can motivate many people to join in. Those are people to rely on when results have to be evaluated on-site throughout the year. Did the flowering seed mixes emerge well? Have mowing dates been adhered to? In case there is lack of success, this also has to be addressed in order to improve next year's performance.

Further information on the objectives, process progress and related cost can be found in the brochure “Eh da-Flächen nutzen – Artenvielfalt fördern. Praxisleitfaden für Anlage und Pflege” (“Using land in hand – enhancing diversity of species. Practical guide for creation and maintenance”). The brochure is available in German at <http://tinyurl.com/o779z44> or can be ordered at info@eh-da-flaechen.de.