**Sunday 17 September**

**Virgin Trains creates a buzz at Penrith station with new bee garden**

A new garden at Penrith station, Cumbria has been created to welcome an entirely different type of local commuter, thanks to the work of Virgin Trains and 25 local gardeners. The garden, located at Platform 2 in Penrith train station, is thought to be the first bee-friendly garden on the West Coast Main Line and is designed to provide the insects with the habitat they need and show how important they are in the production of food.

What began as a small idea from Liam Edmondson and John Kelly (Virgin Trains Customer Service Assistants at Penrith) to create a space for customers to relax before catching a train has flourished into a bee garden thanks to the hard work of the Penrith Community Gardeners.

Liam and John initially set out to provide customers with a space they could sit and relax away from the hustle and bustle of the station, in support of Virgin Trains’ partnership with national charity Rethink Mental Illness. However, it soon became apparent that the garden could also provide the tranquil habitat needed by a different type of local sightseer.

Keen to highlight the declining habitats available to bees and inspire people to encourage bees in their own gardens, the Penrith Community Gardeners brought together gardeners, volunteers, clients from Eden Mencap and schoolchildren from North Lakes School to create a bee haven.

The garden features bee-friendly plants including nasturtiums, wildflowers and rosemary, a grassed area with picnic benches and a Bee Hotel. To encourage bees across the station, suitcases transformed into planters have been placed on different platforms. Visitors can learn more about bees through a colony of decorative yellow bees on display that feature facts about buzzy insects.

Michael Byrne, Virgin Trains Station Manager at Penrith, said: “At Virgin Trains, our stations are gateways to the local communities we serve. Here in Penrith our bee-friendly garden offers a warm welcome to people and bees alike, and we can reassure our customers that in true Cumbrian spirit, the local bees are a very friendly, laid-back bunch.

“We’re proud to support what matters to the local community and create a place where people can take time out of their day to relax. We’ve had great fun working with everyone involved – not only have we helped to attract more bees but we’ve brightened up the station, brought a smile to those travelling to, from or through Penrith station, and created a real buzz within the community.”

Joan Robinson, from Penrith Community Gardeners, said: “We love to work with the Virgin Trains team at Penrith – they’re so enthusiastic. With half a million people using Penrith station each year we wanted to make the introduction to our town as friendly as possible. The station is an ideal location to encourage everyone to ‘bee’ friendly as well!”

Darryl Cox, Science & Policy Officer at Bumblebee Conservation Trust, said: “It’s fantastic to see the local community and the Penrith station team come together to make a space for bees and other pollinators. Our wildflower habitats have undergone a serious decline over the last eighty years and this is a shining example of how we can provide food for pollinators in our communities. It would be great to see other stations follow their lead. Perhaps there could even be a competition for the most bee-friendly railway station.”

The Penrith Bee Garden has been nominated for the Cumbria in Bloom Awards and features as part of the town’s entry in Britain in Bloom, where it has reached the final.

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**Bumblebee Conservation Trust**

**Facts & Figures about Bees**

* In the UK, we have over 250 species of bees, only one of these is the domesticated honeybee, 25 are bumblebees and the rest are solitary bees
* Sadly, many of our wild bee species have experience serious declines in recent times and several are now nationally extinct. One bumblebee species, the Short-haired bumblebee is only present as a result of efforts to reintroduce it
* The main reason for these declines is habitat loss. Staggeringly, the UK has lost over 97% of its wildflower meadows since the 1930s, leaving bumblebees and other pollinators with very little to feed on. This combined with new pressures like pesticide exposure and the threat of parasites and diseases is putting our precious pollinators at risk.
* Some studies have estimated that insect-pollinated crops account for one third of very mouthful we eat and that bumblebees can pollinate up to 80% of these foods in the northern hemisphere
* Through the pollination of many commercial crops such as tomatoes, peas, apples and strawberries, insects are estimated to contribute over £600 million per annum to the UK economy (2015), and in doing so prop up the £108 billion per-year food and drink industry in Britain. Across the EU, insect pollinators are estimated to contribute €14.2 billion annually to the EU economy (2012).

**What can people do to help bees at home?**

* Visit [www.beekind.bumblebeeconservation.org](http://www.beekind.bumblebeeconservation.org) to score how bee-friendly your garden is and received plant recommendations
* Grow bee-friendly flowers in your garden or even in a window box, making sure that you provide flowers from March – October, as different species emerge at different times of the year. Most of our rarer species emerge later in the season (May onwards), which means that they need a pollen and nectar source into the autumn time
* Provide a nesting place for bumblebees in your garden – visit <http://bumblebeeconservation.org/about-bees/habitats/bumblebee-nests/#row221> for details
* Become a member of the Bumblebee Conservation Trust to support our work <https://bumblebeeconservation.org/support-us>
* Learn how to identify bees and help monitor them <http://www.beewalk.org.uk/>
* Create a solitary bee hotel

**About Virgin Trains**

Stagecoach and Virgin are working in partnership to operate the East Coast and West Coast inter-city routes under the Virgin Trains brand. Together, they are on track to revolutionise rail travel across the UK.

The combined network connects some of the nation’s most iconic destinations including Glasgow, Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Leeds, York and London.

Virgin Trains is committed to delivering a high speed, high frequency service, offering shorter journey times, more comfortable travel and excellent customer service. Customers consistently rate Virgin Trains as one of the top long-distance rail franchise operators in the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) commissioned by industry watchdog, Transport Focus.

On the East Coast route, £140m is being invested to create a more personalised travel experience. We have already invested over £40m in our existing fleet, including £21m refurbishing interiors and £16m towards improving the engines of our trains. Customers can now benefit from 42 additional services between Edinburgh and London every week, and an extra 22 Saturday services between Leeds and London – a total of 1.74 million additional seats since May 2016. 2018 will see the introduction of completely new Azuma trains being built in the UK by Hitachi.

The West Coast route has a proud record of challenging the status quo - from introducing tilting Pendolino trains, to a pioneering automated delay repay scheme and becoming the first franchised rail operator to offer m-Tickets for all ticket types.

Visit the Virgin Trains Media Room - [virgintrains.co.uk/about/media-room](http://mediaroom.virgintrains.co.uk/) - for the latest news, images and videos. Subscribe [here](http://www.mynewsdesk.com/follow/47939) for regular news from Virgin Trains.

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