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Laurier earns its pollinator wings with official Bee Campus designation

WATERLOO – Wilfrid Laurier University’s Waterloo campus has been **officially designated as a “Bee Campus”** by [Bee City Canada](#). Laurier is the ninth post-secondary campus in Canada and the first in Waterloo Region to be recognized for a dedicated commitment to helping protect and support pollinators.

Insect populations are declining across the globe, which is a significant concern as approximately 90 per cent of flowering plants on Earth depend on insect pollination. Threats to wild bees who provide important pollination services include habitat loss, pesticide exposure and climate change. Bee City Canada, a charitable organization, is trying to combat this decline by inspiring cities, towns, First Nations communities, schools and businesses to proactively protect pollinators. Kitchener, Waterloo and Wellesley Township were all recently designated as Bee Cities, and in September, Waterloo Regional Council voted unanimously to become Canada’s first Bee Region.

Laurier has long been a friend to bees, dating back to its [introduction of on-campus honeybee colonies in 2017](#). The university’s latest efforts – prioritized in its [Sustainability Action Plan](#) – focus on planting pollinator-friendly plants and habitat to support wild bee populations, particularly those considered vulnerable or at risk.

“The decision to focus on supporting native bees is based on current research that shows this is where efforts should be centred from a conservation perspective,” said [Jennifer Marshman](#), PhD candidate in Laurier’s Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, and a key participant in Laurier’s bid to become a Bee Campus.

Laurier’s innovative bee-friendly initiatives include:

- **PolliNation**, a student-led social enterprise that sells “bee hotels,” which are birdhouse-like wooden structures designed to attract native bees. With their sales profits, PolliNation donates bee hotels to local schools and educates students about the declining pollinator populations.
- A **pollinator spiral**, which provides approximately 36 feet of dedicated habitat for ground-nesting bees and other beneficial insects. The pollinator spiral is located on Laurier’s [Northdale campus](#) in Waterloo, which is also home to a large community garden, a market garden and urban agriculture training site, and a community-built pollinator garden. The pollinator spiral is the first to be designated in Waterloo Region and will be used as a focal point for pollinator education and community engagement.
- **Courses** that emphasize the importance of pollinators, like Geography and Environmental Studies Professor [Robert McLeman](#)’s Environment, Sustainability and Society course, in which first-year students submit designs for pollinator habitats on campus.

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"It's very exciting for us to achieve this designation from Bee City Canada, and even more so because it was student-led," said **Stephanie MacPhee**, manager of Laurier's [Sustainability Office](#). "We love to see passionate students taking the lead on initiatives such as this that support the goals of the [Laurier Sustainability Action Plan](#)."

One such passionate student is **Julia Bedford**, who is in her third year of the Business Administration program at Laurier. Bedford is the research and development specialist for PolliNation and spearheaded the completion of the university's application to Bee City Canada along with her PolliNation teammates and Marshman. Bedford will lead Laurier's Bee Campus committee, which will hold its inaugural meeting in early 2020.

"I want to help better the environment and believe that taking care of our native bees is vital to our ecosystem," said Bedford. "By partnering with Bee City Canada, we can strive as a campus to help the bees. We are raising awareness and educating the local community."

Laurier will receive its official Bee Campus certificate from a Bee City Canada representative at a celebration event in the spring.

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