

Call to Action: Supporting our Pollinators



by **Ruth Shin**, Defra Policy Advisor

As beekeepers well know, bees and other insect pollinators matter. Through pollinating wild and garden plants they contribute to biodiversity. By pollinating crops they provide variety in our diets; everything from apples, strawberries, raspberries, plums and pears, to cucumber, tomatoes, runner beans and oilseed rape rely on bees and other insects. Pollinators have an intrinsic value to society, as any beekeeper will appreciate when carefully tending to a hive.

At least 1,500 species of insects pollinate plants in the UK. This includes honey bees, 26 species of bumblebee, 260 species of solitary bee, 270 hoverfly species, hundreds of species of flies and beetles, and many butterfly and moth species. All have complex life cycles and specific needs. Most require food in the form of pollen and nectar from February to October, and need a home for shelter and nest building. As beekeepers are fully aware, the number of insect pollinators is highest in the summer coinciding with peak plant growth and supplies of nectar and pollen.

Pollinators face many threats, including habitat loss, disease, extreme weather, climate change and use of some pesticides. Bees need food and a home to survive, but as a result of the way the landscape has changed, through urbanisation, industrialisation and intensive agriculture, not all insect pollinators can readily find the food and shelter they need.

National Pollinator Strategy

Defra's National Pollinator Strategy, due for publication this autumn, is being drawn up to address many of these challenges. It has the aims of increasing diverse and flower-rich habitat, ensuring



A colony of honey bees surrounded by Ox-eye daisies.

a resilient bee and pollinator population, and enhancing awareness across businesses, other organisations and the public. Prior to publication of the strategy, we are looking to address this third aim of enhancing awareness, and to turn this awareness into action to support pollinators. We want to build on the public momentum which is already in motion, not least among beekeepers and beekeeping associations. In July we launched our 'Call to Action' for pollinators: *Bees' Needs: Food and a Home* (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/bees-needs-public-urged-to-support-pollinators>).

Five simple things we can all do to help

The 'Call to Action' is a simple message for all land managers about the essential needs of bees and other pollinators, and how to fulfil these needs. By making a few simple changes to our land management practices, we can make a substantial difference for pollinators. In the first stage of the 'Call to Action', we launched our five simple actions that anyone can take to play their part for pollinators. Whether you own a garden, an orchard or a window box, there is something you can do to help our valuable insect pollinators. We invite you to take the following five simple actions:

Simple actions you can take

- Grow more flowers, shrubs and trees that provide nectar and pollen as food for bees and other pollinators throughout the year. For example, pussy willow, primroses and crocuses all flower in spring, lavenders, meadow cranesbill and ox-eye daisies bloom during summer, ivy and hebes in autumn, and mahonia shrubs and cyclamen will provide winter forage.
- Leave patches of land to grow wild and weedy with plants like stinging nettles and dandelions, which will provide other food sources, such as leaves, for caterpillars and breeding places for butterflies and moths.
- Cut grass less often and, ideally, remove the cuttings to allow plants to flower.



Bumblebee on Sea Buckthorn. All photo courtesy of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Crown Copyright.



Cutting your grass less will allow plants to grow and flower.

- ❑ Avoid disturbing or destroying nesting or hibernating insects, in places like grass margins, bare soil, hedgerows, trees, dead wood and walls.
- ❑ Think carefully about whether to use pesticides, especially where pollinators are active or nesting or where plants are in flower. Consider control methods appropriate to your situation and only use pesticides if absolutely necessary. Many people choose to avoid chemicals and adopt methods like physically removing pests or using barriers to deter pests. If you choose to use a pesticide, always follow the label instructions.

Further information

You can find further information at: <http://beesneeds.org.uk> This includes advice on planting pollinator-friendly plants from February to October and effective alternatives to pesticides for different land managers. You will also find our custom-made animation explaining, in a fun and simple way, the scientific uncertainty around pollinator status, the threats they face and what we can all do to help. We are working with non-governmental organisations, including the British Beekeepers' Association and the Bee Farmers' Association, businesses and retailers to promote this message and advice through traditional and social media. The message of making simple changes to land management to improve resources for pollinators is one that underlies many of the priority actions in our National Pollinator Strategy. It builds on our existing policies to improve biodiversity, including *The Natural Choice* (Natural Environment White Paper, 2011) and those within *Biodiversity 2020* (2011).

Do watch this space! This autumn when we publish the strategy; we will be introducing along with it the next phase of our 'Call to Action'. This will consist of initial detailed advice on how to manage different types of land to support pollinators. Building on the simple actions, this will be tailored information on land types from farmland to urban spaces to your own back garden. Our 'Bees' Needs' advice is based on evidence and/or expert judgement. It draws on research from projects such as the Insect Pollinators Initiative (IPI). Over the next two years, the initial detailed advice will be developed further and updated, in light of the emerging results from the IPI and other research. We would encourage everyone to take actions now to provide the right resources for pollinators. Getting this right is an early priority for the National Pollinator Strategy and, with your help, would be a huge step forward for pollinators. ✿



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