

Insects and Pollinators

“We have pollinators to thank for every third mouthful we eat”

(The Wildlife Trusts 2019)

Pollinators are animals who help transport pollen within flowers or from one plant to another. They are essential to all life on Earth, as they pollinate food crops, as well as wildflowers. It has been predicted that per year they pollinate £690 million worth of crops and without them it would cost around £1.8 billion per year for humans to do it.

Examples of these essential species include bees, wasps, butterflies, moths, beetles, hoverflies, bats and birds. However, even with this important role, insects seem to be having a tough time, potentially dying out up to 8 times faster than larger animals, and 41% of insect species face extinction.

The Wildlife Trusts, among others, are running a campaign to raise awareness for the plight of insects called [Action for Insects](#).

Threats to pollinators

- **Habitat Loss** – This is one of the major threats to pollinators, as loss of habitat also means loss of food, shelter, protection and nesting ground. 97% of the UK’s wildflower meadows have been lost or are isolated in small pockets, often surrounded by agricultural land or the built environment, thus making it difficult for pollinators to access.
- **Climate Change** – Seasonal changes such as disrupted flowering patterns can affect food sources; this can be particularly detrimental to insect specialists that rely on particular resources. Extreme weather such as more frequent and severe floods, drought or changes in temperature, can also have a huge impact e.g. parasites are more likely to survive during warmer winters.
- **Pesticides** – These have had a huge impact on pollinator decline, with many neonicotinoid pesticides banned by the EU. Herbicides, if used excessively can reduce availability of flowering plants on which pollinators rely.

Protecting pollinators: Benefits to the Council

- Improved and increased local biodiversity - a key target we should all be trying to achieve.
- An opportunity to bring the community together, through education and engagement - this in turn provides more support for the Council.
- Brings people together for nature, to improve health, wellbeing, community spirit and belonging.
- Increased financial benefits can be gained by managing land for pollinators; this includes cutting grass less frequently, which can save money and reduce pollution. Dorset County Council, for example, has saved around £93,000 per year by only cutting rural road verges when needed.
- Helps to protect local food production and horticulture, as no pollinators = no food.

What you can do

“Local authorities have a responsibility to conserve biodiversity under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. This Biodiversity Duty requires all local authorities to make biodiversity an integral part of policy and decision making; this includes the restoration and enhancement of pollinator populations and habitats” (Buglife and Friends of the Earth Trust).

- Introduce a Pollinator Action Plan – This should detail how your authority intends to provide pollinators with food, shelter, nesting sites and allow them to thrive. The Action Plan should be specific to farmland, urban areas etc., and state the aims and objectives, including any priorities.
- Plant native flower species which are rich in nectar
- Help to protect wildflower meadows.
- Engage with the Living Landscape scheme to help connect up habitats, thus making it easier for pollinators to access flowers.
- Commit to Local Planning and Green Infrastructure initiatives.
- Undertake sympathetic management on Local Wildlife Sites, including verges.
- Educate schools and businesses on how and why we should conserve pollinators and their environments.
- Encourage the public to allow parts of their gardens to grow wild, instead of mowing.
- Build bug hotels out of materials such as old bricks, flower pots, leaf litter etc. and ensure they have a protected place in which to shelter.
- Run monitoring and surveying sessions to engage and interest the community.
If the community feels part of the solution they are more likely to do their bit to protect wildlife.

Taking action for insects is quite easy

Two simple options include reducing the use of pesticides and growing more wildflowers.

[Buglife](#) is an organisation dedicated to saving invertebrates and runs a number of [pollinator projects](#) along those lines. Talking of ‘lines’, Buglife is working with partners to establish a series of ‘B-lines’ across the country e.g. insect pathways, and here is a map of those in [Leicestershire and Rutland](#). Similarly, Friends of the Earth has been running a campaign to raise awareness of the plight of bees. This is called [Bee Cause](#) and their website provides a really useful [guide to developing a pollinator plan](#).

Other actions can include the creation of [‘bee hotels’](#) and greater use of [green roofs planted with wild flowers](#), but see the list below for more comprehensive details of how Parish Councils can help. Here is a 12-minute video of [what councils can do for pollinators](#).

Further reading and advice

Developing a Local Pollinator Action Plan or Strategy

<https://cdn.friendsoftheearth.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/Helping%20pollinators%20locally.pdf>

DEFRA Guidelines on The National Pollinator Strategy in England

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/794706/national-pollinator-strategy.pdf

Government information on using pesticides in or near water

www.gov.uk/government/publications/application-to-use-herbicides-in-or-near-water -

Further information from The Wildlife Trusts on how to help pollinators

www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-and-wild-places/saving-species/save-bees-and-pollinators

www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/plant-flowers-bees-and-pollinators