

Five surprising Aussie pollinators that make your dinner possible

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Credit: Jonathan Finch - Hawkesbury Institute for the Environment

We owe such a lot to the humble European honeybee. For an insect that was only brought to Australia in 1822, it has become well-established as one of our most important crop-pollinating insects.

But honeybees are under threat from pests and environmental changes that have caused widespread colony collapse around the world. That's one reason why there's growing interest in Australia's native [pollinators](#)

that keep our food and natural ecosystems ticking along.

Australian Pollinator Week is all about raising awareness of the important role of [pollinators](#) so that we can look after them and ensure they are ready to pollinate our orchards, fields and forests.

Professor James Cook of the Hawkesbury Institute for the Environment ([opens in new window](#)) at Western Sydney University shares his top five native pollinating superheroes:

1. Native bees: with around 2000 species of [native bees](#) in Australia, these little beauties are well-adapted to our native flowers and many are surprisingly active on our fruit crops. Many of them live on their own in the ground or in plant stems – you can even build them a home with a Bee Hotel.
2. Flying Foxes: these nocturnal pollinators love the sweet nectar of native flowers. Flying foxes can be absolutely covered in pollen and are essential in the health of native forest ecosystems and as pollinators.
3. Flies and Butterflies: even those pesky blowflies that bother us in summer are actually important pollinators – in fact, they are important pollinators of avocados and coffee plants! Your Saturday brunch just wouldn't be the same without them!
4. Moths: flowers of some fruit crops like Pawpaw only open at night and attract moths as pollinators. Moth-pollinated flowers are often white or translucent and can be fragrant to attract moths by their scent.
5. Birds: Many native bird favourites such as lorikeets and honeyeaters perform pollination services for native plants, often emerging covered in pollen that they move between flowers as they feed on the nectar of native trees.

"Around the world, European honeybees have been severely affected by

pests like the Varroa mite, loss of flowers for food and nesting habitat, and climate-change events such as increasing drought," explains Professor Cook.

"That's why it's so important that we all look after the wide variety of pollinators that live in Australia by giving them food, shelter and habitat. It's for our own food security too, as well as their survival."

James explains that there are several really simple tips you can do in your own garden to encourage pollinators:

- Plant a landscape or garden with diverse species, including trees such as flowering eucalypts, mid-height species like lilly-pilly, Grevillea, Callistemon and Leptospermum and ground level plants such as our native Australian daisies, as well as our favourite culinary herbs – and leave some of the flowering weeds in place too, as plants like dandelions are excellent bee pantries
- Don't regularly mow the lawn to extremely short – plenty of grasses and other ground covers provide food and habitat
- Leave some patches of exposed, well-drained earth for ground-dwelling solitary bees to nest in
- Check small cracks / holes in masonry or brickwork for solitary [bees](#) before deciding to fill them
- Check out the Australian Pollinator Week page on native bee specialist, Dr. Megan Halcroft's website Bees Business, for free information on how to create pollinator habitat gardens and how to support our native beneficial insects (www.beesbusiness.com.au). (opens in new window)
- Take 10 minutes in your garden to join in the Wild Pollinator Count. You don't need to be an insect expert, or need any fancy gear, and may see some great pollinators! Full instructions at wildpollinatorcount.com

Provided by Western Sydney University

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