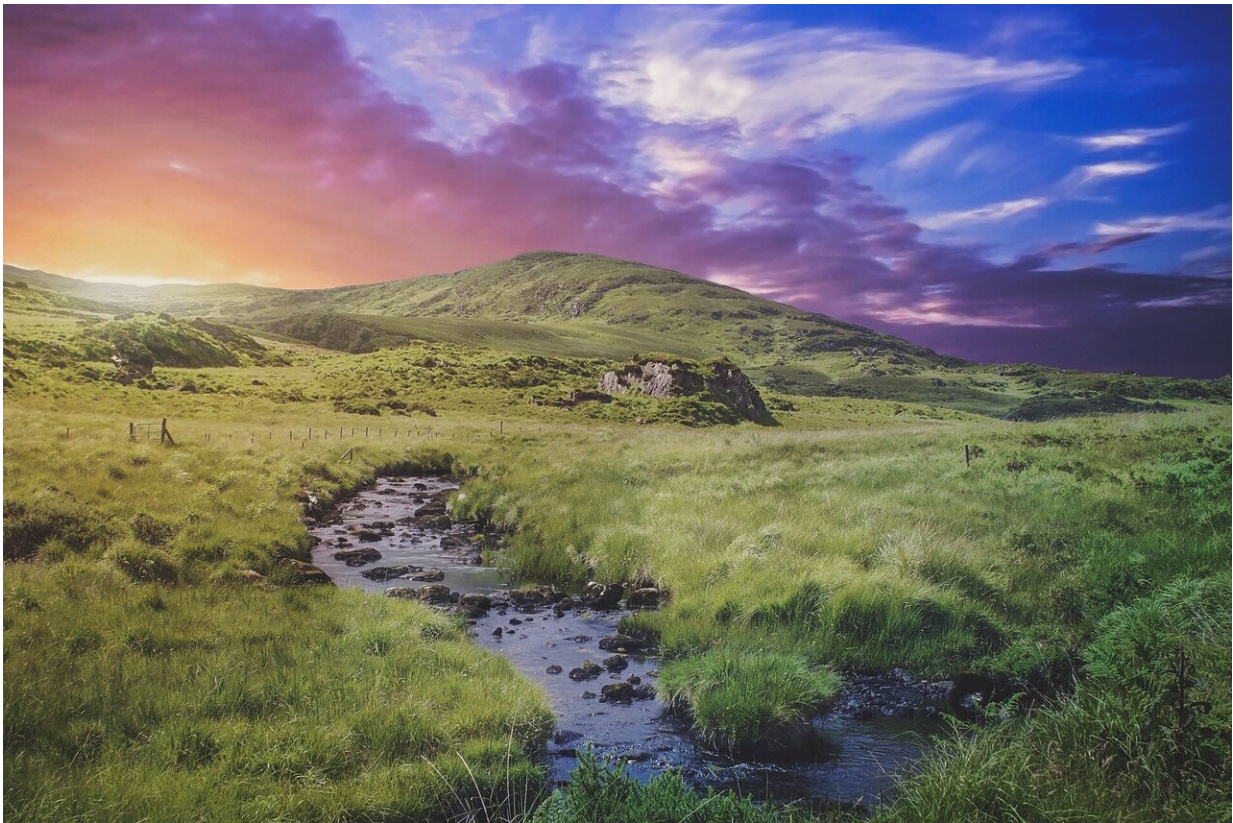


Value of Ireland's insect pollinators greatly underestimated

September 27 2019, by Thomas Deane



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A [newly published report](#) claims that both the market and non-market values of pollinators in Ireland are currently greatly underestimated.

The EPA-supported "Pollival" study led by Trinity has shown that even if we just consider locally produced [food crops](#), loss of pollinators in Ireland could risk a €20-59 million hit per year in crop production.

And if we consider the huge amount of animal-pollinated food we import from elsewhere, pollinator loss could cost more than €800 million per year to the Irish economy through increased import costs.

Pollinators are important to society for a lot of reasons—they ensure productivity in many of our fruit and vegetable crops, contribute to food security and healthy diets, and enable consumer choice. They are also beneficial for other commercially important plants (including feedstocks for livestock, fibres and biofuels).

But pollinators are in decline. One third of bee species in Ireland are at risk of extinction and half of all Irish bee species are in decline.

Lead author of the Pollivalreport, and pollination specialist, Professor Jane Stout of the School of Natural Sciences, Trinity, said:

The risk of pollinator loss globally will have local market impacts in Ireland, in terms of increased food prices, and an increased trade deficit in animal pollinated crops.

Pollinators aren't just important for crop pollination. They also enable wild plant reproduction, meaning they are essential components of natural food chains, providing food for other wildlife, and they make ecosystems more resilient in the face of climate and other environmental change.

This contributes to the natural beauty of the landscape that we enjoy for recreation, that attracts tourists, and which benefits our physical and mental wellbeing. This value to people is much harder to estimate, but

this new study reveals that Irish people are aware of the role that pollinators play in our natural and farmed landscapes, and that they are willing to pay for pollinator conservation.

Professor Stout added:

As part of this project, Trinity researcher Dr. James Murphy surveyed 1,000 randomly selected members of the Irish population, and found that over 80% of respondents were aware that bees were in decline in Ireland, and more than 90% agreed it is important to protect bees and the benefits they provide.

In the survey (carried out in conjunction with Red C Research) people were asked to indicate how much they would be willing to pay to conserve pollinators in Ireland, and where that payment should come from.

"On average, respondents indicated they were willing to pay an average of €4-6 per month (and up to €10) to protect bees and the flowers they pollinate, but further research will be required to develop a robust estimate of the willingness to pay for pollinator conservation," said Professor Stout.

Although most studies have focused on the value of pollinators for [crop production](#), in this survey people were showing that the existence of pollinators, and their role in wild plant pollination, was important to them.

More than half the respondents supported increased taxation to enable pollinator conservation, though most preferred the introduction of tariffs on products that harm pollinators and fines for actions that damage places pollinators live, breed or eat.

Co-ordinator of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan (AIPP) implementation and Chair of its Steering Group, Dr. Una FitzPatrick, senior ecologist at the National Biodiversity Data Centre, said:

"These findings demonstrate that people are aware of pollinator decline in Ireland and are keen for something to be done. Given the support for the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan from members of the public, community groups, local authorities and businesses, I am not surprised at these findings."

The All-Ireland Pollinator Plan (AIPP) was launched in 2015 to address pollinator decline in Ireland. It contains 81 actions and is supported by more than 90 organisations across the island of Ireland.

Dr. FitzPatrick also commented that the [public support](#), and the value of pollinators to Ireland, was not reflected in the funding that has been allocated to deliver the actions in the AIPP.

She added: "We could do so much more if we had proper financial support—we have had to turn down over 30 requests for workshops and talks in the past few weeks because we simply do not have the resources to meet the demand from Irish people."

More information: Jane C. Stout, et al. Assessing Market and Non-market Values of Pollination Services in Ireland (Pollival). www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/research/Research_Report_291.pdf

Provided by Trinity College Dublin

Citation: Value of Ireland's insect pollinators greatly underestimated (2019, September 27) retrieved 26 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2019-09-ireland-insect-pollinators-greatly-underestimated.html>

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