

Expert warns of a future without bees if shoppers don't alter our food buying habits

September 30 2021, by Neil Vowles



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Curry, baked beans and jam are just three of the creature comforts we

will lose if bees become extinct, according to bee expert and University of Sussex Professor Dave Goulson.

The tiny creatures are crucial to the eco-system due to their role in pollination, but populations are rapidly declining as a result of habitat loss, pollution and the [use of pesticides](#), among other factors.

And through a series of stark images Prof Goulson has revealed just what the devastating impact would be—should our fuzzy friends disappear for good.

Because they're the dominant pollinator in most terrestrial ecosystems, many thousands of wild plant species and 75 percent of the crops we grow wouldn't be pollinated, he warns.

And as these pictures highlight, the amount of fruit and veg available in supermarkets would be hugely reduced, and many flower varieties will similarly cease to exist.

The University of Sussex professor has teamed-up with Clipper Teas in Organic September to highlight the threat posed by pesticides to bee numbers and in turn the eco-system.

This follows research of 2,000 adults also commissioned by the organic, fairtrade tea makers which found a quarter don't realise [organic farming](#) helps bee populations thrive.

Dave Goulson, Professor of Biology in the School of Life Sciences at the University of Sussex, said that "many pesticides are directly toxic to [bees](#)—not just insecticides, but also fungicides and herbicides.

"And worryingly honey stores in bee nests often contain cocktails of 10 or more pesticides.

"There is abundant evidence these pesticides kill bees or have 'sublethal' effects such as impaired learning, low resistance to disease, and reduced fertility.

"Furthermore, herbicides also get rid of weeds—otherwise known as wildflowers—so less food for bees."

The study also found 37 percent aren't sure how [organic food](#) is better for the environment than non-[organic produce](#).

Four in 10 don't know food produced this way contains no harmful chemicals, similarly 44 percent aren't aware fewer pesticides are used.

More than half also don't realise organic foods are better for insects and other animals, and 59 percent have no idea they're also better for our own health.

Caroline Rose, from Clipper Teas said that "it's surprising that over half our nation isn't aware that organic foods are better for insects and other wildlife and that nearly 60 percent don't realise the wide-reaching benefits of organic produce on not just the environment, but their health.

"We're asking more people to buy organic because simply put, more organic produce means more organic farms and more organic farms means fewer pesticides and more wildlife. What's more, there's no compromise on taste, less nasties in your food and drink means a cleaner, more natural and more delicious flavour, so there really is no downside."

Organic produce is also completely natural, and it's also not bleached or dyed a particular colour—traits 61 percent and 65 percent respectively aren't aware of.

Furthermore, 43 percent don't know organic soil can help prevent [climate change](#)—because it absorbs more carbon dioxide than non-organic varieties.

And this lack of awareness may explain why 27 percent of adults don't consider the impact on the eco-system when purchasing food produce and other items.

However, there is good news—the study carried out through OnePoll found 64 percent have taken steps to make their garden or outside space bee friendly.

Popular methods include planting bee friendly plants and flowers (72 percent), letting their lawn grow for longer than normal (45 percent), and not using pesticides (42 percent).

Prof Goulson added that "there are at least 6,000 different types of pollinating insect in the UK alone.

"Bees are remarkably clever—they're able to learn the most rewarding flowers, memorise landmarks, and navigate to and from their nest over miles of countryside.

"They also avoid empty flowers by sniffing them for the whiff of a previous recent bee visitor.

"And the phrase 'busy bee' is not without merit—a single bee can pollinate 4,000 flowers in a day.

"So it's wonderful to see just how many people are doing their best to help bees—but the battle to save them is far from over."

What would vanish if bees became extinct

- Christmas cake
- Baked beans
- Spicy food
- Pasta sauces
- Pizza toppings
- Many curries
- Strawberry jam (and most fruit jams)
- Ribena
- Kiwi fruit
- Turnips
- Melons
- Tomatoes
- Cucumbers
- Squashes
- Pumpkins
- Courgettes
- Strawberries
- Raspberries
- Mangoes
- Apples
- Avocados
- Apricots
- Cherries
- Peaches
- Plums
- Pears
- Blackcurrants
- Blueberries
- Broad beans
- Runner beans

Citation: Expert warns of a future without bees if shoppers don't alter our food buying habits (2021, September 30) retrieved 16 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-09-expert-future-bees-shoppers-dont.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.