

# People are essential to conserving pollinators

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A global study has concluded that people are essential to conserving the pollinators that maintain and protect biodiversity, agriculture and habitat.

"There's increasing awareness of the importance of [pollinators](#) to our [quality of life](#)," lead researcher Rosemary Hill said.

"That discussion is often reduced to how to protect bees, and how to expand the amount of land managed as conservation reserves.

"What we found is that the best way to protect pollinators is to support those people whose cultural, spiritual and economic lives are tied to them."

While pollinators can range from weevils to monkeys, and from tiny shrimps to birds and bats, bees are the main pollinators of our food, and the key focus of the investigation.

Associate Professor Hill, a human geographer at CSIRO and James Cook University in Cairns, worked with colleagues from 15 nations to investigate pollinator conservation in 60 countries, on every continent except Antarctica.

"Where people have cultural and [religious beliefs](#) about pollinators, perhaps identify them as their totems, and have taboos and other practices that protect them, they will protect and foster not just the pollinators but their habitats," she said.

"Where local communities rely on bees as a source of honey and wax, they will not just protect the bees, their habitat and their nectar sources, they will also acquire detailed knowledge of their biology and ecology that will contribute to long-term, sustainable management of those resources."

The researchers have formulated policies that will support what they call biocultural conservation, which they recommend for government agencies, natural resource managers and world heritage managers.

"There is almost always, in some part of the world, a conflict involving government, conservation, and indigenous and local communities as to

the best way to protect significant tracts of land," Associate Professor Hill said.

"Two current examples would be the disputes in Myanmar and Northern Thailand, where conservationists are critical of traditional land use, and indigenous peoples fear losing their traditional land to national parks.

"Our research indicates that the best way to protect pollinators, which underpin the long-term health and productivity of natural environments, is to keep people on their land."

The policies recommended are:

- Requiring prior informed consent (from traditional owners) for [conservation](#) and development
- Securing customary tenures
- Strengthening indigenous and community-conserved areas and other traditional governance that supports pollinators
- Supporting knowledge co-production activities
- Promoting heritage listing
- Fostering livelihoods based on beekeeping
- Promoting food sovereignty.

**More information:** Bicultural approaches to pollinator conservation, *Nature Sustainability*, DOI: [10.1038/s41893-019-0244-z](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-019-0244-z) , [www.nature.com/articles/s41893-019-0244-z](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41893-019-0244-z)

Provided by James Cook University

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