



Pollinators: providers of eco-services

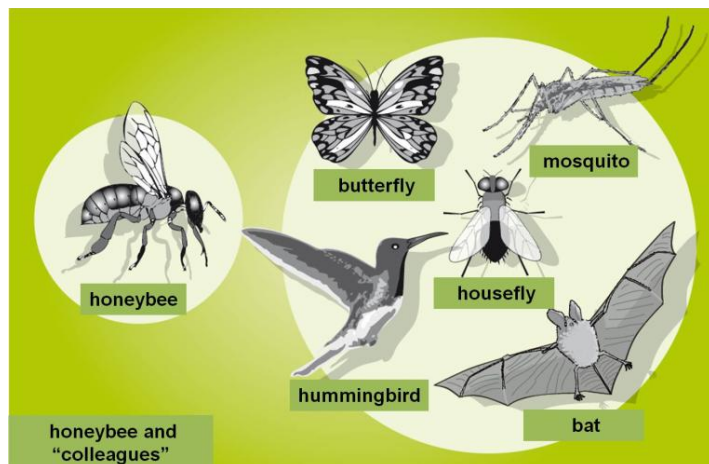
One top issue on the European agenda

The value of pollination for agriculture and the environment is commonly appreciated. During the “European Week of the Bees and Pollination” in Brussels in early June this year, representatives of science, industry and politics also underlined the political significance.

There is wide agreement in the professional world: Pollination by insects is a very decisive “ecological service“. As major crops, which depend on this pollination such as fruits, almonds, coffee, cacao and a lot of others become more and more important, the global relevance of pollination grows in parallel. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization FAO, about 35 percent of all food producing crops depend on this eco-service. In contrast to this relevance, however, there are reports about a decline of pollinating insects from many regions of the world. This is also true for Europe.

All kinds of pollinators

This downward trend is by no means limited to the honeybee. Butterflies, solitary bees, bumble bees and pollinating flies often are losers as well. On a global scale, more than 300 000 species belong to these groups of insects. The group of hymenopterans such as bees, bumble bees, wasps and hornets alone encompasses 25 000 to 30 000 species worldwide.

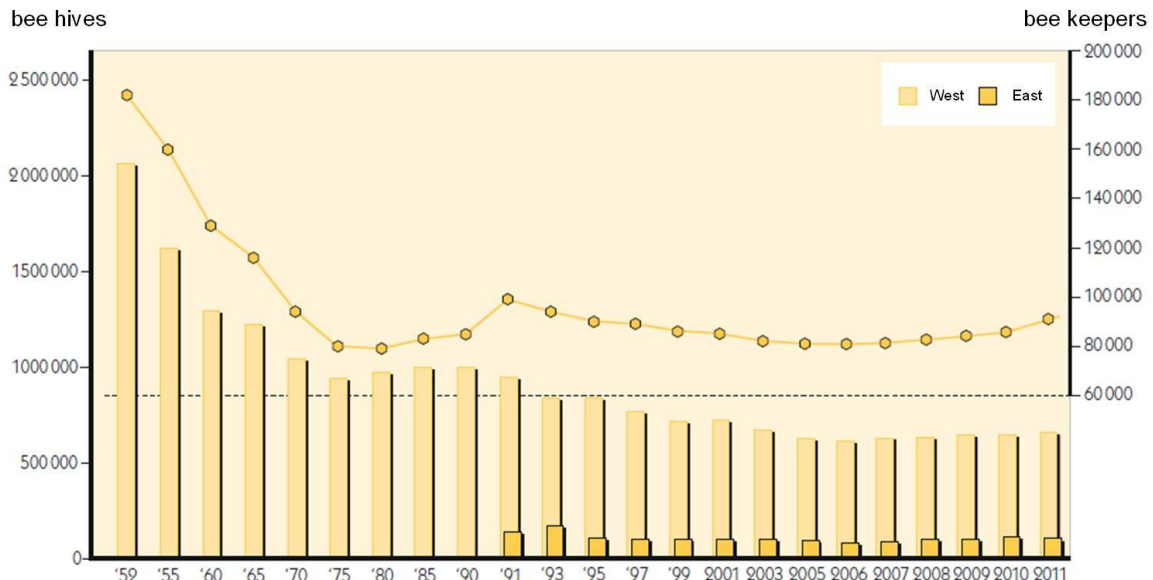


Within the group of dipterous insects, there are about 160 000 species. In addition, butterflies and – in tropical regions – different bats, hummingbirds and other bird species should not be neglected as pollinating species ¹⁾.

Many challenges

As there are all these different pollinators, the scientific talks and discussions during the “European Week of the Bees and Pollination” went far beyond issues which are of relevance for the honeybee. And yet – and as a consequence of the multi-factorial influences – the honeybee remained a focal point of interest throughout the conference. Parasites, most importantly the varroa-mite, and pathogens including new bee pests which can be introduced from other regions of the world belong to this multitude of detrimental influences. When not used properly, also plant protection products may

¹⁾ BFN, 2008



Beekeeping in Germany is slightly increasing again

harm bees. Furthermore, the lack of honey plants, supplying appropriate pollen and nectar for bees, can have negative impacts on their lifetime. In spite of many commonalities, there are different types of problems in different European countries. In addition, the national results of bee research with regard to the extent and the causes of bee decline are not compatible in all cases. As a positive development, however, the number of beekeepers is rising again in some regions.

Dedicated concepts

What answers do politics offer for this special type of situation, which does not allow to expect simple solutions? 3.5 million Euro are granted by the EU-Commission for research in bee losses in 17 EU member states, Germany being one of them. The “European Reference Laboratory for Bee Health” develops strategies to monitor bee hives and to avoid the introduction of new diseases. Data on the development of bee hives are gathered

globally, and – taken as a whole – agriculture shall provide more space for more biological diversity which also abets the honeybee.

How can production-oriented agriculture be combined with the protection of honeybees and other pollinators? In the course of the discussion during the “European Week of the Bees and Pollination” it was emphasised again and again that future agriculture needs to be sustainable agriculture. Solid progress in favour of biodiversity and hence in favour of the honeybee could only be achieved with farmers obtaining high yields at the same time; that was the bottom-line of many contributions.

Further information on the issue:

<http://www.bees-biodiversity-network.org/?p=85>
<http://www.theparliament.com/latest-news/article/newsarticle/honeybee-decline-could-be-disastrous-for-food-production/>
<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/10/1667&language=DE>