

Saving bees – without simplifying

Saving bees is much in vogue now, and this is a good thing. Many people are caring about bees, in fact the most frequent question I get about my work is "Are bees still under risk?". The concern about bees fortunately arrived in a bigger public. As I already [mentioned](#), you can only save what you know. Therefore, any initiative to get people involved is positive. Concern about pollinators arrived also in policy: in February there was an international expert meeting organized by [IPBES](#) in Kuala Lumpur. This panel presented assessments about the worldwide importance of pollination. A summary for policy makers was already published and in the next weeks, a full report should be available. Yesterday, a [ministerial media round table](#) about this assessment took place in Nairobi. There were several tweets informing about this event, underlining the importance of pollination not only for nature, but also for human societies.

Pollination and pollinator issues arrived therefore at the highest levels of world policy. Hopefully, this will create some opportunities - for science, for conservation work, for food safety etc.

Does saving bees mean beekeeping?

This encouraging development has some drop of bitterness, though. Still "pollination" is linked to honey bees in most people's heads. And not only this: to Western Honey Bees, *Apis mellifera*. And as you can see on the photo above, even honey bees are more than this one species (*Apis dorsata* together with *Apis florea*). In many media, beekeeping is presented as the main measure to save pollinators. In a newsletter for sustainable consumption I read the headline "This easy you can save the bees!". The article was propagating urban beekeeping, saying that it takes only a few hours a month to get your own honey and help bees. But... this does not get the whole picture. Do not get me wrong, if more people get interested in beekeeping, this is good. It's a nice hobby, you get much more reward out of it, than just the honey. Urban beekeeping and other "trends" like urban farming are helping people in cities to get aware of natural procedures. They satisfy the need of simplicity and "back to the roots" many have these days. And if this leads to a better understanding of "nature", I am more than happy with this.

The point is: beekeeping cares about one species of 20,000. Recently, there is more and more [evidence](#) that crop pollination cannot depend only on managed honey bees. Not even bees are enough, as also other insects take their part in this task. Going further, for all the plants in this world which need animal pollination, the Western Honeybee is not enough. What deeply irritates me in headlines like the one cited above is the simplification, the reduction to a "trend". If you put a honeybee colony in your garden and don't care about it correctly, you won't have much fun with it. Not only you will not have any honey, but you may even create problems for other beekeepers. Reinfesting their colonies with varroa mites, spreading American Foulbrood and other diseases. I am not saying that everyone has to get a bee scientist to save the bees. This would be an exaggeration in the opposite direction. But I do not like simplification.

Ask yourself what you can do for saving bees

Saving bees has many aspects. There are many things that everyone could do, the most important may be having an open mind. Every little step helps, if it takes only a second or a life long, no money at all or big funding. Just a few examples:

- A click for a petition to defend a natural reserve.
- Visiting an exposition of bees and art.
- Planting wild flowers in your garden.
- Building nest boxes with children.
- Counting bumblebees for a Citizen Science initiative.
- Investigating the pollination ecology of a rare plant.
- Developing renaturation measures in agricultural landscape.

There are many more possibilities, the list could be endless. So just ask yourself: "If I want to help pollinators, what can I do?". Respect your possibilities and resources. Get all the information you can. Share your fascination with others. And please: do not simplify.