

Embargo: 00.01 April 13 2018

Supply chains at risk as wild pollinators decline, finds new Cambridge report

Companies face potential shortages of raw materials, a fall in crop quality and challenges around security of supply because of an emerging pollination deficit, a new report funded by the Cambridge Conservation Initiative has found.

Around three quarters of food crops depend on pollination, making pollinators worth up to US\$577 billion annually, of which half comes from wild pollinators. However, pollinator populations are declining rapidly, with more than a third of wild bee and butterfly species facing local extinction.

The pollination deficit: Towards supply chain resilience in the face of pollinator, authored by UN Environment World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC), Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL), Fauna & Flora International (FFI) and the University of East Anglia (UEA), also found businesses lacked information about the potential risks to their supply chains.

In a survey of eight blue chip companies including Asda, The Body Shop, Mars and Pepsico, many reported they were unable to take action because of uncertainty around which crops and sourcing regions were vulnerable to pollinator decline.

“Less than half the companies sampled know which of the raw materials they source depend on pollinators,” said **Gemma Cranston, Director, Natural Capital, CISL**. “Their supply chains could be at risk and need additional research to identify where opportunities exist to reverse current trends.”

Jos van Oostrum, Director Sustainable Solutions, Mars Incorporated, said: “The role pollinators play – be it tiny midges for cocoa or squirrels for coconut – is not well understood and can be taken for granted. It is of critical importance we understand their lifecycles, and the habitat and conditions which enable them to thrive. This does not only help safeguard productivity of the crops we depend on, but it could also help establish ways to boost their yield potential.”

One of the key solutions for more sustainable supply chains is certification schemes. A review of nine such programs showed some action is being taken, particularly to encourage reduced pesticide use and encourage habitat restoration, but more could be done.

“Certification schemes play an important role in driving corporate best practice. Effective integration of the needs of wild pollinators into such schemes will help companies to move faster on this issue,” said **Laura Fox, Senior Programme Manager, FFI**.

The team assessed the vulnerability of the top 15 pollinator-dependent food crops. Preliminary results suggested that these crops are vulnerable to pollinator decline, with cocoa being particularly at risk.

“Pollinator decline is a serious issue for crops where wild pollinators are important to production and can’t easily be replaced, because managed bees can’t do the job, or the need for them isn’t widely recognised,” said **Dr Lynn Dicks, Research Fellow at UEA**. “Our analysis is revealing a concerning lack of knowledge about the status of agricultural pollination and its replaceability in large parts of the world, despite its clear importance to production of some highly valued ingredients.”

Francesca Brkic, International Sustainable Sourcing Manager at the Body Shop, said: “The importance of pollination for natural raw materials is increasingly a priority for us. We are analysing the importance of pollination within our business to understand how we must act. Bees are very important to us and we recognise the positive impact that comes out of sustainable trade to supply chains that depend on pollinators as well as communities who produce honey and beeswax as an integral part of their livelihoods.”

The organisations involved in the project now hope to collaborate with industry, certification bodies, trade associations, governments and pollination experts to create a leadership group of companies and standard setting bodies committed to safeguarding pollinators.

“We call on leading companies and standard setters to work with us to create a Partnership for Pollinators to collaborate to increase supply chain resilience,” said **Annelisa Grigg, Principal Specialist, Business and Biodiversity, UNEP-WCMC**. “It is only by working in partnership in this way that we will be able to understand the full extent of the potential risks posed by pollinator decline to our vital agricultural supply chains and catalyse action to halt wild pollinator decline.”

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Notes to editors

About the University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership

The University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL) brings together business, government and academia to find solutions to critical sustainability challenges. CISL provides the secretariat to the [Natural Capital Impact Group](#), a global network of companies, working collaboratively to determine how business can evolve its strategies and operating practices to sustain the natural world and its resources, while creating new market opportunities and competitive differentiation.

Find out more: www.cisl//www.cisl.cam.ac.uk

About the UN Environment World Conservation Monitoring Centre

The UN Environment World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) is a world leader in biodiversity knowledge. We work with a global network of scientists and policymakers to place biodiversity and natural capital at the heart of environment and development decision-making. By improving access to high-quality information and analyses, we empower global leaders enlightened choices for people and the planet.

About Fauna & Flora International (FFI)

FFI protects threatened species and ecosystems worldwide, choosing solutions that are sustainable, based on sound science and that take account of human needs. Operating in more than 40 countries worldwide, FFI saves species from extinction and habitats from destruction, while improving the livelihoods of local people. Founded in 1903, FFI is the world's longest established international conservation body and a registered charity. www.fauna-flora.org

University of East Anglia (UEA) www.uea.ac.uk

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