No bees, no food, save our bees and pollinators

Introduction

Bees and insect pollinators are an essential part of protecting our environment, pollinating food crops and healthy ecosystems. Accelerated by threats such as habitat loss, increased use of pesticides, as well as climate change, almost 40% of bees are on the Red List and classified as vulnerable to critically endangered. The continuing decline of bees and insect pollinators leads to a loss of biodiversity and overall damage to ecosystems plus loss of crops in agriculture. Therefore, it is time to act!

What is at stake?

The majority of plant species (84%) benefit from insect pollination and 78% of temperate wildflowers need biotic pollination. 76% of European food production is dependent on pollination by both wild and domestic bees as well as other pollinators. It has been estimated that approximately 10% of the total economic value of the European agricultural output for human food produce, which amounted to €22 billion in 2015 (€14.2 billion per year for the EU), is due to insect pollination.

The continuing decline in populations of pollinators does not only affect food security and nature conservation but also rural livelihoods. In the EU, many insect pollinator populations are in decline as the result of changing environmental conditions such as habitat loss, the decline in biodiversity, climate change and invasive species which destroy pollinators' natural ecosystem. The most important direct threats are agricultural methods and the excessive use of pesticides.

Crop pollination services are dependent on a small fraction of species: 2% of all bee species deliver 80% of crop pollination. Wild pollinators are in decline: the European Red List for bees indicates that more than 40% of species are classified as vulnerable, endangered or even critically endangered. Data on pollinators is often missing or fragmented; for example, 18 countries lack a 'red list' which makes overseeing and managing the problem difficult.

Beyond its crucial importance for agriculture, natural biodiversity depends on pollinators – wild flowers, trees and seed-producing wild plants can only survive with the contribution of wild bees and their domestic relatives.

In the EU, there are approximately 600,000 beekeepers holding around 16 million beehives. They produce about 250,000 tonnes of honey and various other bee products like pollen, beeswax, royal jelly and propolis.

EU beekeepers can only meet 60% of the demand – the rest of the honey is imported from oversees countries such as China (48%) or South America. Furthermore, the quality of honey circulating in the EU or imported from abroad is more and more questioned.

Imported honey products costs about one third (1.50 instead of 3.50) of those produced in the EU. As a result, the declining honey harvest caused by the loss of biodiversity and industrial agriculture, the death of bees due to bee parasites, infections, pesticides, unfair competition from abroad and rising production costs are creating major difficulties for beekeepers and pollination services.

The number of beekeepers is constantly declining and the number of beehives is stagnating.

Every year, the total volume of pesticide sales in the EU-28 amounted to almost 400,000 tonnes. Many of them are directly harmful for pollinators; the use of herbicides is leading to a loss of biodiversity and a lack of diverse pollen and nectar for the bees.

Neonicotinoids are listed as one of the worst pesticides, especially the deadly six: imidacloprid, thiamethoxam, acetamiprid, clothianidin, thiacloprid and dinotefuran.

In 2012, the total use of neonicotinoids compared to the total agricultural area ranged between 12.2g/ha in Germany to 30.5 g/ha in the Netherlands. The lethal dose for bees is in the range of micrograms!

For many years, we Greens, together with many NGOs and beekeeper associations, have been fighting for a general ban on neonics.

The European Commission has prolonged its decision to act in order to wait for the EFSA's study on three neonics. This study has been postponed several times. In February 2018, the EFSA finally presented its results! Neonics as systemic pesticides are so harmful to the whole insect and pollinator world that the EFSA is proposing a COMPLETE BAN on their use outdoors.

At long last, on April 27th, a working group from Member State agricultural ministries decided to ban all outdoor uses of three of the neonics most toxic to bees and other pollinators.

Therefore, the European Green Party:

1. welcomes the proposal by the European Commission, agreed by the Member States on April 27th, and demands that the European Commission expands the EFSA proposal and announces a ban on the use of all kinds of neonicotinoids on open land. To guarantee strict observance, comprehensive public controls of the end products should be carried out to exclude unfair competitive advantages;

2. demands that Member States commit to protecting bees and other insect pollinators, and set in place tools, resources and networks to help to protect biodiversity crucial for existing species and favour the positive development of populations;

3. demands that Member States commit to preserve and enlarge habitat and nature conservation of and for bees and insect pollinators;

4. demands that the European Commission links all future CAP subsidies to bee- and insect pollinator-friendly agriculture techniques. The most effective way to secure Europe's biodiversity, environment, food sovereignty and the survival of pollinators and ensure a healthy food is to prioritise agri-ecological and organic farming schemes in the future CAP and moving towards a Common Food Policy[1];
5. Calls for an end to the systemic use of insecticides like neonics, and for an end to the blanket use of herbicides like glyphosate in agriculture that is starving bees and other pollinators; Using sufficiently funded, public farm advice services that inform about alternatives to pesticides, these should be replaced with agroecological methods.

Save the bees; save the pollinators; save biodiversity; and farm the land better …NOW!

[1] See EGP resolution adopted in Karlstad, November 2017 for our vision of CAP https://europeangreens.eu/content/different-vision-cap-building-food-and-farming-systems-are-fair-socially-just