

Bees and Pollinators

Bees are not the only pollinators out there. Other insects, such as butterflies, moths, flies, and beetles, as well as some birds and bats, also play a role in pollination. While they may not be as efficient as bees, they still contribute to the pollination of many plants. Their importance cannot be overstated. The critical role they play in the reproduction of many wildflowers and other plants, supports biodiversity and provides habitats for many other species.

Native bees have been around for thousands of years and have adapted to their environment and local plant life. Honey bees, on the other hand, are not native to North America and were introduced by European settlers in the 17th century. They have since spread across the continent and have become a crucial part of the agricultural industry. In Northeast Ohio, honey bees play an important role in pollinating apple, cherry, blueberry, and pumpkin crops. Without their help, these crops would not be able to produce as much fruit or would require manual pollination methods. They are responsible for pollinating approximately one-third of all the food we eat, including fruits, vegetables, nuts, and seeds.

Honey bees have been a popular and thriving species, but their presence can have both positive and negative effects on the local ecosystem. Honey bees are known for their ability to collect and store large quantities of nectar and pollen, which can make it more difficult for native bees to access these resources. For example, bumblebees and other native bees have been observed to avoid flowers that have already been visited by honey bees. This has created debate regarding the honey bee's impact on native bees and other pollinator populations and their potential to compete with native species for resources. Another potential issue with honey bees is their susceptibility to diseases and parasites, which can spread to native bees and other pollinators. The varroa mite, a parasitic mite that infests honey bees, can also infest bumblebees and other native bee species.

However, studies have shown that honey bees may also have a positive impact on native bee populations by increasing the overall availability of floral resources. This is because honey bees have a longer foraging range and can visit more flowers than many native bee species.

Our recent Sherman Road Talk with Mike Byers, Certified Arborist-Botanist-Ecologist, indicated that to mitigate the negative effects of honey bees on native bee populations, it is important to encourage the growth and preservation of native plant species that are adapted to the local environment. Native plants provide important resources and antibodies for native pollinator species and can help ensure their survival in the face of competition from honey bees. Providing these habitats is essential to protect and promote pollinator populations.

This can be done by planting pollinator gardens, which includes plants that provide nectar and pollen for native bees and other pollinators. It is extremely important to avoid the use of pesticides and other chemicals that can harm pollinators. Instead, use natural pest control methods or choose plants that are resistant to pests.