



REPORT

Green Foundation Ireland
invites you to an evening online
TALK with **Mary Montaut** of the
Federation of Irish Beekeepers' Associations

Why Pollinators Matter



Venue: by Zoom (details given after registration)
Tuesday 17 May 2022 – 19:00 to 20:00

Admission to this event is **FREE** but you **MUST** register beforehand.
You can do so through [our Eventbrite page here](#)

*This event is part of **National Biodiversity Week 2022**
organised by the **Irish Environmental Network***

Why Pollinators Matter

THEME

Plants feed almost every other life form.

During our talk, special attention was given to insect pollinators, but also to other means of pollination.

This event was part of the [National Biodiversity Week 2022](#) organised by [Irish Environmental Network](#).

ABOUT OUR SPEAKER

Mary Montaut of the Federation of Irish Beekeepers' Associations:



Mary was born in England, spent her teens in Australia, went to Cambridge to study English Literature and came to Ireland in 1980.

Until recently the Editor of *The Irish Beekeeper (An Beachaire)*, she has been keeping bees in Bray, County Wicklow, for about twenty-five years and her interest in honey bees has gradually extended to include all sorts of pollinators.

ABOUT OUR FACILITATOR

Claire Downey: Claire, who is a Director of Green Foundation Ireland, is Policy and Research Director at the Rediscovery Centre, in Ballymun, Dublin.

ABOUT OUR PHOTO

The lovely photo of a bee in a sunflower was taken by **Martin Nolan**, Director of Green Foundation Ireland and was commented on by our speaker as a wonderful example of a plant for pollination.

Claire Downey welcomed everyone to our event and introduced **Mary Montaut** from the Federation of Irish Beekeepers' Association, who opened her wonderful talk by explaining that "pollinators matter" because plants cannot move. They are rooted in one spot. Plants rely on pollinators to carry and spread their pollen (or sexual material), and also depend on pollinators to carry and spread their gene pool. Mary recommended the recent book by the English botanist, Timothy Walker [*Pollination: The Enduring Relationship between Plant and Pollinator*](#).

Mary said that the slogan "think global, act local" is a really good one to explain all the small local things we can do to attract and help pollinators and the plants they pollinate. Mary quoted from [*The Diversity of Life*](#) by the American scientist, E. O. Wilson: "Biodiversity is our most valuable but the least appreciated resource".

From a biodiversity point-of-view a neatly mown lawn of grass with no daisies, buttercups or dandelions is a desert. It won't attract pollinators.

She went on to mention that in 2020, Kew Gardens produced a stunning report [*The State of the World's Plants and Fungi*](#) in which it is reckoned that two in every five plants all over the world are threatened with extinction. One of the reasons this is happening is because of loss of habitat. This loss of habitat in turn is caused by farming.

Agricultural land tends to be poor in biodiversity. If you have acres of monoculture, for example, of oilseed rape, then biodiversity falls away and becomes extinct.

Mary continued by talking about the intimate nature of the relationship between pollinators and plants, and the intelligence of plants. Pollination is complex and depends on interaction between plant and animal life. In the intricate complex system of our world, pollination allows lots of species to co-exist. Insects are attracted by the scent from a plant or the nectar not the pollen but they carry and spread the pollen.

There are essentially four types of pollinators:

- **Animals** – small animals carry and spread seeds and pollen as they move around.
- **Water** – some plants live in and pollinate under water, while others, like water lilies, come to the surface of water to blossom and attract pollinators.
- **Wind** – the wind will carry and spread pollen, but the wind is hard on plants.
- **Insects**.

Mary agrees with the American expert on moss who said she believes in photosynthesis, a plant's ability to use sunlight to produce its own nutrition, sugars and carbohydrates.

In his book on pollinators, Timothy Walker gives a 'job description' for a pollinator:

- It must be a safe and timely transporter of pollen – wind and water are not timely.
- The pollinator (or its offspring) should return annually – wind and water less reliable in this respect.
- It should share a habitat with the plant that it is pollinating.
- It shouldn't be too specific about the plants that it wants to pollinate.

- Pollinators must be sufficiently numerous, have sufficient physical fitness and be of a suitable size to keep biodiversity evolving.

Although rising temperatures bring out insects, bumblebees are not coping well with global warming, while other insects are.

There is a mutual dependency between animals and plants. All sorts of creatures are good pollinators. Some have no interest in the pollen, but are attracted by the nectar. Mary then showed us pictures of animals and insects acting as pollinators, including:

- Hoverflies on Ceanothus.
- Ragwort. Attracts pollinators and is not as invasive as we think because it dies out.
- A solitary bee and inula.
- Lapidarius on Thistle. We really need wildflowers. Let insects feed on wild flowers.
- Pascuorum bee (ginger bee) on Eccremocarpus, a tubular flower.
- Honey bee on wild marjoram.
- Edgeworthia and a honey bee.
- The great green wall of Africa. 21 African countries working together to force back desertification and allow regeneration. Loss of habitat caused by overgrazing. Mere stumps of vegetation were left alone to regenerate, just leave them. Look up the great green wall of Africa it is a great example of regeneration.
- Local hedgerows superb illustration of biodiversity. Charles Darwin referred to "this tangled bank".
- Dandelions are brilliant.
- Anything that you like the smell of will attract pollinators for example Daphne has a strong scent.
- Wasps do a great job of eating up pests like greenfly.
- Honey possum on banksia.
- Drakensberg crag lizard on the nectar of a plant.
- The black and white lemur on a traveller's palm is the world's largest pollinator; it forces open the flowers to drink the nectar and the pollen covers its nose.
- Waffle bird feeding on Grevillia.
- Silvereye.
- Rambon lori Keet on Banksia.
- Butterfly on Edgeworthia (which is named after the Irish family!).

Finally, Mary recommended [The Forgotten Pollinators](#) by Stephen Buchmann and Gary Paul Nabhan as a wonderful read on the topic.

Claire then ended with thanking Mary for her extremely engaging and interesting talk. With over 30 people attending out of the 51 who registered online, there were many interesting questions in our usual Q&A session.

Anyone lucky enough to have the opportunity to attend one of Mary's talks comes away inspired by her knowledge and enthusiasm and the way she makes seemingly complicated botanic science so easy to understand.