



On Friday 19th November last, Connemara Beekeepers Association hosted a Zoom talk given by one of our founder members, Neil Spellacy. He spoke on the topic: “Beekeeping and it’s role in protecting our other Pollinators”.

There seems to be a boom in beekeeping at the moment, this is possibly fuelled in the media by the idea that we need to somehow “save the bees” because they are in imminent danger. Yes, for example in the US there have been instances of Colony Collapse in hives which have been used on an industrial scale to pollinate the Apricot orchards in California. They are put to work on trees which have been sprayed with pesticides and insecticides, so no surprise there!

Over the past couple of years many people have attended an Introduction to Beekeeping course, and by the early summer have gotten themselves a hive of honeybees. Unfortunately, within six months, their bees have died out. Consider this: if someone attended a sheep-rearing course, then gotten themselves some sheep, and by Christmas their sheep were all mysteriously dead, there would be serious questions to be answered. We must regard our hives of bees the same way as we see any other livestock. If, for example, we know that the wild birds are in danger of extinction, the cure is not to rush off and start keeping chickens! We can’t all be beekeepers but we can and must learn how we can help to maintain the living environment for all pollinators.

There are a hundred different species of bees in Ireland and the honeybee is just one of them. There are also Solitary bees, Ground-nesting bees and Cuckoo bees. Along with these various bees there are many species of flies, butterflies and other insects which all perform pollination as part of their lifecycles.

So, what can we do, should we go and plant our gardens with “wild-flower mixes”? It seems not, because the use of ‘wildflower’ seed mixtures fails to address and can even aggravate the real issues of biodiversity loss. These seeds may look pretty when in flower, but this practice lends itself easily to “greenwashing”, ie. symbolic actions which don’t really benefit the environment. These “wildflower” seed mixes are from exotic sources, are non-native and can be invasive. Where have all our own “native” meadows and wildflowers gone? Where are all our native hedgerows and their blossoms? A re-investment in our native species is the goal that we should be working towards.

So, in summary, we don’t need to plant “wildflowers”, instead we can create habitat areas and embrace ivy and nettles. These actions will not reduce your honey crop, instead they will encourage you to be a more adaptable beekeeper. Once you have rewilded all or part of your garden, you can register it as Pollinator-friendly. Your neighbourhood is where biodiversity starts - encourage your neighbours and friends to take part.

Links:

- The Dublin Naturalists' Field Club website link: <https://dnfc.net/wildflower-seed-mixtures/> has an excellent and well researched article on “wildflower mixes”
- Dedicated Irish Pollinators site: <https://pollinators.ie/wildflower-seed/>
- Only supplier of Genuine Irish native wildflowers: <http://www.wildflowers.ie/index.htm>