



Press Release
Luxembourg, 9 July 2020

EU action had little effect on halting the decline of wild pollinators, say auditors

EU measures did not ensure the protection of wild pollinators, according to a new report from the European Court of Auditors (ECA). The biodiversity strategy to 2020 was largely ineffective in preventing their decline. In addition, key EU policies, among which the Common Agricultural Policy, do not include specific requirements for the protection of wild pollinators. On top of this, EU pesticides legislation is a main cause of wild pollinator loss, say the auditors.

Pollinators such as bees, wasps, hoverflies, butterflies, moths and beetles greatly contribute to increasing the quantity and quality of our food. In recent decades, however, wild pollinators have declined in abundance and in diversity, largely due to intensive agriculture and the use of pesticides. The European Commission has established a framework of measures in response to this, largely based on its 2018 Pollinators Initiative and its biodiversity strategy to 2020. It has also put in place measures with the potential to affect wild pollinators under existing EU policies and legislation. The auditors assessed how effective this action has been.

“Pollinators play an essential role in plant reproduction and ecosystem functions, and their decline should be seen as a major threat to our environment, agriculture and quality food supply”, said Samo Jereb, the Member of the European Court of Auditors responsible for the report. “The EU initiatives taken so far to protect wild pollinators have unfortunately been too weak to bear fruit.”

The auditors found that the EU’s dedicated framework does not really help to protect wild pollinators. Although no single action in the EU’s biodiversity strategy to 2020 was specifically aimed at reversing the decline in wild pollinators, four of its targets may indirectly benefit pollinators. Yet the Commission’s own mid-term review found that for three of these targets, progress had been insufficient or non-existent. The review also specifically identified pollination as one of the most degraded elements in ecosystems across the EU. The auditors also note that the Pollinators Initiative has not led to major changes in key policies.

The purpose of this press release is to convey the main messages of the European Court of Auditors’ special report. The full report is available at eca.europa.eu.

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The auditors also found that other EU policies promoting biodiversity do not include specific requirements for the protection of wild pollinators. The Commission has not made use of the options available in terms of biodiversity conservation measures in any programme, including the Habitats Directive, Natura 2000 and the LIFE programme. As far as the CAP is concerned, the auditors consider that it is part of the problem, not part of the solution. The greening and cross-compliance requirements under the CAP have not been effective in halting the decline of biodiversity on farmland, as the EU auditors concluded in a recent [report](#).

Finally, the auditors also emphasise that current EU legislation on pesticides has been unable to offer adequate measures to protect wild pollinators. The legislation currently in force includes safeguards to protect honeybees, but risk assessments are still based on guidance which is outdated and poorly aligned with legal requirements and the latest scientific knowledge. In this connection, the auditors point out that the EU framework has allowed Member States to continue using pesticides thought to be responsible for massive honeybee losses. For example, between 2013 and 2019, 206 emergency authorisations were granted for the use of three neonicotinoids (imidacloprid, thiamethoxam and clothianidin), even though their application has been restricted since 2013, and they have been strictly banned for outdoor use since 2018. In another [report](#) published this year, the EU auditors found that integrated pest management practices could help reduce the use of neonicotinoids, but that the EU had made little progress so far in enforcing their use.

As the ‘Green Deal’ will be at the top of the EU’s agenda in the coming decades, the auditors recommend that the European Commission:

- assess the need for specific measures for wild pollinators in the 2021 follow-up actions and measures for the EU biodiversity strategy to 2030;
- better integrate action to protect wild pollinators into EU policy instruments addressing biodiversity conservation and agriculture; and
- improve the protection of wild pollinators in the pesticides risk-assessment process.

Notes to Editors

Special report No 15/2020 “Protection of wild pollinators in the EU: Commission initiatives have not borne fruit” is available on the ECA website (eca.europa.eu) in 23 EU languages.

This audit complements recently published ECA special reports on [Biodiversity on farmland](#), [Pesticide use](#) and the [Natura 2000 network](#).

The ECA presents its special reports to the European Parliament and the Council of the EU, as well as to other interested parties such as national parliaments, industry stakeholders and representatives of civil society. The vast majority of the recommendations we make in our reports are put into practice.

Information on the measures the ECA has taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic can be found [here](#).

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