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EDITED BY

Michael D. Ulyshen,
United States Department of Agriculture,
United States

REVIEWED BY

Diane Lynn Larson,
United States Department of the Interior,
United States

*CORRESPONDENCE

Neelendra K. Joshi
[✉ nkjoshi@uark.edu](mailto:nkjoshi@uark.edu)

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Current trends in bee conservation and habitat restoration in different types of anthropogenic habitats

Olivia Kline and Neelendra K. Joshi*

Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR, United States

Recent declines in bee populations and ranges have been cause for concern due to the valuable pollination service that they provide. Several factors have been proposed to contribute to these declines, including habitat loss, pathogen spread, and pesticide usage, so many pollinator conservation schemes have involved the addition of pollinator-friendly habitat through wildflower plantings and artificial nesting sites. Because of this, many efforts have been made to enhance bee populations across different landscape types, including natural, agricultural, urban, and industrial areas. Many of these schemes have focused on providing habitat for bees and other animal pollinators in agricultural landscapes, but other managed areas, such as cities, suburbs, and industrialized areas may have untapped potential for pollinator conservation. Available green space can be enhanced to provide healthy forage and safe nesting sites for pollinators. As these areas are also often frequented by human residents, the needs and perceptions of people, as well as the potential benefits for pollinators, must be considered to ensure the success of pollinator conservation on anthropogenic habitats.

KEYWORDS

wild bees, butterflies, wildlife, conservation, pollinator habitat, solar parks, roadside verges

1 Introduction

Bees, along with other flower-visiting insects and animals, provide the essential ecosystem service of pollination, which can benefit wild ecosystems, large-scale agricultural landscapes, and smaller residential gardens (Garibaldi et al., 2011; Ollerton et al., 2011; Lowenstein et al., 2015; Reilly et al., 2020; Allen-Perkins et al., 2022). Worldwide, around 85% of wild angiosperms are animal pollinated (Ollerton et al., 2011). In agriculture, over 75% of the leading food crops benefit from animal pollination, showing better yields and often larger, more appealing fruit when visited by pollinators (Foley et al., 2005; Klein et al., 2007; Sáez et al., 2020; Hünicken et al., 2021; Levenson et al., 2022). This pollination service improves the profits for growers, amounting

to over \$171 billion USD globally (Gallai et al., 2009). As well as providing pollination in natural and agricultural landscapes, bees and other animal pollinators can improve the fruit set of plants in residential gardens (Lowenstein et al., 2015; Reilly et al., 2020).

Despite their importance across these natural and anthropogenic landscapes, several native bee species of North America have had population and range declines in recent years, which can then lead to losses in the pollination services they provide. This has been best documented in the bumble bees (*Bombus* spp.) in North America (Colla and Packer, 2008; Grixti et al., 2009; Cameron et al., 2011; Jacobson et al., 2018), though in Europe, there is more documented evidence of similar declines in solitary bees (Rasmont et al., 2005; Fitzpatrick et al., 2006). In many regions, these declines have resulted in an overall loss in bee species richness and local pollinator populations (Turley et al., 2022; Nagamitsu et al., 2024), which are unable to meet the pollination requirements for dependent crops (Rucker et al., 2012; Degrandi-Hoffman et al., 2019). There have been several drivers implicated in these pollinator declines, including habitat loss, pesticide usage, parasites and pathogens, and climate change (Goulson et al., 2015; Belsky and Joshi, 2019; 2020).

The importance of bees and other pollinators, along with the concerns for their population declines, has led to an increasing need to mitigate risks and find ways to enhance pollinator populations across different landscapes (Alison et al., 2022; Glenny et al., 2022; Stout and Dicks, 2022; Duque-Trujillo et al., 2023). A growing trend in pollinator conservation has been the conversion and restoration of anthropogenic habitats, including cities, suburbs, and rights-of-way (ROWs) into pollinator habitat. Adding pollinator habitat to these managed areas, however, can increase human-pollinator interactions. Any pollinator habitat scheme on managed land cannot be for the benefit of the pollinators alone. Rather, for such schemes to be successful, they must rely on the support and enthusiasm of the human stakeholders who own or use the managed land. Here we discuss the potential benefits of developing pollinator habitat in these anthropogenic habitats, as well as the concerns for human health and safety that can arise from such schemes, in order to create more successful pollinator habitat schemes in human populated areas.

2 Enhancing managed landscapes in different habitats for floral resources

There are several managed lands with the potential to provide pollinator habitat and aid in pollinator conservation, including public parks, residential lawns, golf courses, solar parks, roadside verges, and powerline easements. Some of these areas already have semi-natural habitat that can be maintained and enhanced to provide pollinator forage, whereas others are degraded and would require more intensive conversion to provide adequate foraging and nesting sites for pollinators. These conversions could include seeding plots with native wildflowers, reducing pesticide spraying, or mowing less frequently at the sites (Muratet and Fontaine, 2015; Ramer et al., 2019). Any such conversions of developed areas would turn the land into multiple use sites and need to consider factors

affecting the animal pollinators and human stakeholders in the area. These factors would include the original functionality of the site, the expense to implement and maintain pollinator habitat, the perception of the people who use it, and the benefit to local pollinator communities (Hopwood, 2008; Turo and Gardiner, 2019).

Currently, there is little national or international policy regarding habitat management for enhancing pollinator communities. In the United States, most policy implementation has occurred at the state or local level (Hall and Steiner, 2019; Bloom et al., 2022; DiDonato and Gareau, 2022; Pham et al., 2022; Campanelli et al., 2023). Increasing public awareness of pollination population declines and best management practices for improving habitat quality for these organisms, however, can increase local and regional scale improvements to pollinator habitat and populations in anthropogenic habitats.

2.1 Urban and suburban landscapes

Urban areas are often perceived as lacking in native wildlife populations, and many species decline in abundance as they move from natural to urban lands. Bees, however, have been shown to have fairly robust populations in many urban areas, especially when compared to intensive agricultural landscapes (Baldock et al., 2015; Samuelson et al., 2018; Guenat et al., 2019; Theodorou et al., 2020). With the proper management, urban and suburban landscapes are able to support a high diversity of bees and other pollinators (Baldock et al., 2015). Traditionally, most green spaces in cities and residential areas have mowed turfgrass lawns, herbicide applications for weed removal, and non-native ornamental plants (Aronson et al., 2017), which do not support as much pollinator richness and abundance as diverse floral plantings (Lowenstein et al., 2015). Additionally, most of the green spaces in urban areas are privately owned, leading to many individuals making management plans independently, rather than having a unified strategy (Aronson et al., 2017). Public perception of a habitat can also greatly influence the success of a conservation program, in both negative ways, including vandalism and protest, or positive ones, such as bringing in funding for the project (Turo and Gardiner, 2019). Any such programs, in order to be successful in urban and suburban areas, must consider the perceptions of the local residents, the expense and time to create and maintain the habitat, and the needs of the pollinators as well as opportunities for their conservation (Braman and Griffin, 2022).

Public parks are one type of urban green space with potential for creating bee habitat, either through planting low-growing flowers to replace turfgrass or through seeding areas of the park with wildflowers in order to create meadow patches. Surveys of park visitors in Minneapolis, MN reacted positively to the idea of enhancing turfgrass with low-growing forbs, such as lanceleaf coreopsis (*Coreopsis lanceolata*) and calico aster (*Symphyotrichum lateriflorum*), with over 95% of participants saying they would support the program (Ramer et al., 2019). Similarly, in a park in Saltdean, UK, 97% of park visitors supported management schemes to increase the abundance of wildflowers and insects

(Garbuzov et al., 2015). In spite of the support, several park visitors voiced concerns for schemes that would replace turfgrass with wildflowers. These included dislike of the “weedy” appearance of the wildflowers, fear of insect stings, and concerns that the flowers would take up usable park space (Garbuzov et al., 2015; Ramer et al., 2019). Insect stings can be medically relevant, with around 3% of adults that have systemic allergic reactions to them (Golden, 2017). These systemic reactions can result in anaphylaxis and even death in some cases, though occurrences tend to be low. In Europe, an average of 0.26 deaths per million people resulted from reactions to insect stings (Feás et al., 2022). Because of these concerns, any parks aiming to add pollinator habitat should keep areas well marked with signage and well maintained. Public outreach could also help inform people on the benefits of pollinators and keep them safer from stings (Ramer et al., 2019). Additionally, frequently mowed areas for recreation and sport should still be preserved in areas of the park.

In urban habitats, sections of residential lawns can also be converted from frequently mowed turfgrass into meadow patches to enhance pollinator populations, as frequent mowing can alter insect biodiversity (Proske et al., 2022). In an online national survey across the US, people in residential areas responded positively to the idea of adding wildflowers to their yards, though many cited concerns, such as “maintenance time” and “not knowing what to do” (Turley et al., 2020). In public outreach, then, conservation schemes should focus on residential programs that are simple, low maintenance, and relatively small scale (Turley et al., 2020). In addition to actively planting wildflowers, homeowners and renters can decrease mowing frequency to increase flower and pollinator abundance on their lawns (Lerman et al., 2018) and create pollinator friendly habitats in turfgrass systems (Billeisen et al., 2021).

Golf courses, which take up over 2 million acres of land in the US (Dobbs and Potter, 2015), offer another opportunity for pollinator habitat. By design, golf courses have mowed turfgrass fairways intermixed with woody areas and rough patches with taller grasses and other vegetation. These rough patches tend to have less intensive management than the fairways, with less mowing and reduced pesticide spraying, which makes them good candidates for bee habitats, as well as improving the aesthetics of the course (Dobbs and Potter, 2015). Enhanced golf courses with bee habitat can even host rare bee species, such as the three declining bumble bee species, *Bombus auricomus*, *Bombus pensylvanicus*, and *Bombus fervidus*, that were found on Kentucky golf courses after wildflower planting (Dobbs, 2013). Courses with wildflowers can also have greater bee abundance than those with turfgrass monocultures (Billeisen et al., 2021). As with the residential lawns, owners and managers of golf courses have voiced concerns over increased labor and maintenance for creating pollinator gardens (Bates et al., 2023). As such, any plantings should fit within the budget, labor, and time constraints of the golf course.

In cities, the proportion of impervious surfaces can impact pollinator abundance and species richness. Areas with high percentages of paved roads, parking lots, and buildings compared to green space provide smaller and more fragmented habitats for pollinators (Wenzel et al., 2020). Small-bodied pollinators, which fly shorter distances, in particular need more connected habitats to access resources (Zurbuchen et al., 2010). In city environments,

green roofs have become more popular, and have several suggested benefits for the building and surrounding area, including reduced energy consumption, thermal regulation, improved air quality, and enhanced habitat in urban environments (Berardi et al., 2014). For bee pollinators, green roofs with flowering plants were able to support the same species richness and abundance as nearby fields (Colla et al., 2009). Building height, however, can limit the amount of pollinator species that are willing to fly up to the roof (Wu, 2019). Large- and medium-bodied bees were more commonly found on green roofs (MacIvor et al., 2015), so these roofs may not provide the same benefit to bees with shorter flight distances. The surrounding green space in the area can also impact the populations of bees on green roofs (Wu, 2019). Although cities can support numerous pollinator species, they often fail to provide suitable habitats for the rarest and most sensitive species with critical conservation status (Fauvieu et al., 2024).

In the urban and suburban areas, where human residents are living and working in close proximity to these added pollinator habitats, the financial and cultural factors become especially important. For instance, pollinator habitats along footpaths and city roadsides, lacking signage, may appear overgrown and weedy to some residents, so improving public opinion of the sites can involve collaboration between ecologists, community leaders, landscape designers, and others, as well as adding “cues of care” to the habitats, signals to the residents that the areas are being maintained. As urbanization increases, finding successful ways to add pollinator habitat to urban and suburban areas can help maintain pollinator populations and pollination services (Derby Lewis et al., 2019). The interaction of bee habitats with the local human communities - not just the impact of humans on the habitat, but also the habitat on the community - is an important issue that is often overlooked in urban conservation schemes, but one that must be considered for their success (Turo and Gardiner, 2019).

2.2 Solar parks

As solar panels are becoming increasingly cost effective and solar photovoltaic energy one of the primary types of renewable energy, the land use dedicated to solar energy production is expected to increase (IEA, 2019; Blaydes et al., 2021). Though many people have installed solar panels on the roofs of buildings, widespread solar energy requires ground-mounted solar panels (Blaydes et al., 2021). Several solar energy companies have placed their ground-mounted panels in flat gravel-covered lots or fields of turfgrass, though some have put the land to agricultural use (Semeraro et al., 2022), by growing crops (Moore et al., 2022) or hosting livestock amongst the panels (McCall et al., 2023). Another proposed idea is to put in native prairie grasses and flowers, with low-growing, shade-tolerant plant species directly beneath the panels to provide habitat for pollinators (Davis, 2016) or to enhance population of certain bee species (Blaydes et al., 2022). Some solar parks have already established plantings of native perennial wildflowers and have had higher bee abundance compared to solar parks with only gravel or turfgrass (Randle-Boggis et al., 2020). Native prairie plants could have the additional

benefit of improved erosion control and an even more environmentally conscious face for the solar companies (Briberg, 2016; Davis, 2016).

Some environmental and cost concerns have been raised for establishing native plantings in photovoltaic solar parks (Lafitte et al., 2022; McCall et al., 2023). The polarized light reflected off of solar panels can impact the movement and behavior of polarotactic insects, especially those that oviposit in aquatic environments. The solar panels may mimic the glare of sunlight on bodies of water (Horváth et al., 2010; Száz et al., 2016). Most studies have looked at insects with juvenile aquatic phases, such as Trichoptera, Ephemeroptera, and certain Diptera (Horváth et al., 2010; Száz et al., 2016). The area beneath the solar panels tends to be cooler and shadier than the surrounding environment, which can impact plant growth and pollination activity around the panels (Armstrong et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2021). While active pollination still occurred in the full shade regions below panels, the diversity and abundance of pollinators was lower in the full shade compared to partial shade and full sun areas (Graham et al., 2021). Pollinator gardens in solar parks would need to include shade-tolerant flowering plants in the areas under and directly around the panels. The addition of these gardens may provide the greatest benefit to more cold-tolerant pollinators, such as bumble bees (*Bombus* spp.) (Dehon et al., 2019). The implementation and first years management of native plantings can be more expensive and intensive than other solar park management options, such as sheep grazing, gravel lots, and turfgrass (McCall et al., 2023).

2.3 Rights-of-way: roadside vegetation

Roadside verges, the strips of land alongside roads, cover around 50,000 km² in the US, and provide a large area of land that could be used for wildlife habitat (Forman et al., 2003; Phillips et al., 2020). They tend to have more diverse plant species than many agricultural landscapes, including several early successional flowering plants (Hopwood et al., 2015; Phillips et al., 2020). Though roads themselves can cause habitats to become more fragmented, roadside verges can serve as corridors between habitats for insects (Hopwood et al., 2015), and these habitats have potential to support greater pollinator abundance (Dietzel et al., 2023). The conventional methods of maintenance of these sites include frequent mowing, use of non-native grasses, and herbicide spraying for weed control. Restored roadsides, those that have been seeded with native grasses and forbs can provide more flowering plants and support higher numbers and diversity of bees (Figure 1). There are concerns for the pollinators in providing habitat for them alongside roads (Meinzen et al., 2024). Management practices such as mowing of the roadside verges can impact pollinator community as well as their abundance. Similarly, proximity to roads can increase the incidents of vehicle collisions and the amount of automobile pollution, including heavy metals to which they are exposed (Phillips et al., 2020) and the contaminated roadside pollinator habitat (Shephard et al., 2022). Traffic intensity alongside road verges with pollinator habitat can also affect population of certain bee species such as bumblebee (Dániel-Ferreira et al., 2022). Verges alongside roads



FIGURE 1

Illustration showing establishment of pollinator habitats in roadside verges. These pollinator habitats can support diverse communities of pollinators as well as native plant species.

with less traffic and lower speed limits would likely provide the greatest benefit and lower risk for insect pollinators, though more research is needed into the balance of potential hazards and benefits for pollinators in roadside verge habitats. Creating a mowed buffer zone directly alongside the road, with wildflowers planted at least 3 meters away from the edge of the road, may also reduce the risk of collision and contaminant exposure for pollinators (Meinzen et al., 2024).

The greatest human concern for roadsides is road safety, visibility, fire risk, and soil erosion prevention. Wildfires are becoming more common and more extreme in many areas, so the assessment of fire risk along roads is vital. The climate conditions of a region, the amount of dead plant matter, and the flammability of plant species can all impact the likelihood of ignition as well as the duration and intensity of a wildfire (Silva et al., 2014; Molina et al., 2019). Certain plant species are more flammable due to their moisture content and physical and chemical properties (Molina et al., 2019). Roadside design and maintenance can help reduce fire risk by properly assessing these factors and selecting lower risk plants for establishing in verges (Ree et al., 2015; Molina et al., 2019). In the United States, California has experienced frequent largescale wildfires in recent years, especially during drought conditions (Keeley and Syphard, 2021). Global regions like this, which are at high risk of drought conditions and wildfires, should prioritize fire safety near roadsides. Any added wildflower species for pollinators should be selected for low flammability. Mowing and removal of dead plant matter may also be required, which could increase labor costs of roadside maintenance. Though these verges have great potential for pollinator habitat the safety and usability of roads for humans has to be given priority.

2.4 Rights-of-way: powerline easements

Another right-of-way that has been proposed for habitat restoration is the land running along powerlines. In the US, powerline easements take up a sizeable area of land, around 5 million acres in total (Russell et al., 2005). These clearings can offer a different array of flowers and grass species than forested areas, and often a higher diversity of plant species. Instead of frequently mowing around powerline strips, the land along them could be converted into semi-natural grasslands (Eldegard et al., 2017) and pollinator habitat (Figure 2). Converted habitat around powerline easements can host early successional flowering plants and can have a greater diversity of pollinators than forested areas (Wagner et al., 2019) or other resource-poor landscapes (Du Clos et al., 2022), and can also support a diversity of species other than pollinators (Garfinkel et al., 2022). In Pennsylvania, nearly 30% of known bee species in the state were collected along a single powerline easement over a two-year study (Russo et al., 2021). Successful management for pollinator-friendly powerline easements would involve reduced herbicide usage, as well as heavy usage of broad-spectrum herbicides correlated with lowered bee species richness in these habitats (Russo et al., 2021). It would be beneficial to add cues of care to such pollinator habitats, as well, to prevent the easements from seeming abandoned and unmaintained. These could include adding mowed borders around the tall grasses and flowers or adding signs that identify the area as restored prairie habitat for pollinators.

As with roadside verges, however, powerline easements can contribute to wildfire risk, especially in vulnerable and drought-prone regions. Powerline corridors are high risk areas for starting wildfires, as faults in the electrical grid, due to equipment failure or falling trees, can ignite surrounding vegetation (Arab et al., 2021).



FIGURE 2

Illustration showing converted land around powerline easements into pollinator habitat to support pollinator species diversity.

Most fire prevention schemes around powerline include removing trees from growing too close to the lines (Mitchell, 2013; Arab et al., 2021). Taller vegetation, like trees, pose the greatest risk of falling onto or against powerlines, and starting a wildfire. Conversely, trees and larger vegetation tend to only ignite at a higher temperature compared to smaller grasses, twigs, and leaves. As such, they are less likely to catch fire, but these canopy fires can be more devastating than surface fires over low growing grasslands (Jahn et al., 2022). When it comes to adding wildflowers and pollinator habitats to powerline easements, fire safety and prevention must remain a higher priority. Low growing, early successional plants pose little risk of interfering with powerlines or with increasing biomass within the easements (Clarke and White, 2008). In regions of high wildfire chance, low flammability species and ease of management should be prioritized, in order to maintain human and environmental safety.

3 Supplementing landscapes with nesting materials

Any conservation schemes to benefit pollinator populations must consider the habitat requirements of the bees in order to survive and successfully reproduce. Along with floral resources, bees need undisturbed nesting sites that are close to their foraging areas (Kline and Joshi, 2020). Several native bees, including many in the family Megachilidae, nest in existing cavities. Nest boxes or “bee hotels,” especially those with a variety of nesting substrates can promote bee nesting for tunnel-nesting species (Fortel et al., 2016). These tube nest boxes need frequent monitoring and maintenance, however, to keep out parasites and predators. Nest tube liners, such as paper straws, can be used to reduce mites and other pests, but need to be replaced annually (Wilkaniec and Giejdasz, 2003; Joshi et al., 2020). Many of these tunnel-nesting bees also use mud, leaf pulp, or resin in their nest construction, and need those materials available close to their nest boxes (Torchio, 1989). Most bee species, however, are ground nesting, preferring to dig tunnels into soil. The preferences of bees, as far as soil compaction, texture, alkalinity, can vary greatly by species (Cane, 1991). Providing safe areas for these bees can involve leaving patches of untilled and exposed ground within wildflower gardens. One study in France found that many ground nesting bee species were willing to nest in more artificial nests, as well such as wood frame boxes filled with soil (Fortel et al., 2016). Many studies have shown that diverse floral resources can improve pollinator abundance and species richness, but safe nesting sites near these flower planting can also greatly benefit pollinator populations (Bortolotti et al., 2016).

4 Conclusions

Anthropogenic habitats can offer the potential to aid in pollinator conservation, as long as the land use requirements of both the humans and insect pollinators are considered. For humans,

the safety, effectiveness, and perception of the land are important. Any conversion of managed land into pollinator habitat cannot be so drastic as to lose the original function of the land, and collaborations between ecologist and other stakeholders such as landscape architects could strengthen conservation efforts to maximize biodiversity in urban areas (Kiers et al., 2022). For pollinators, both generalist and specialist feeders can benefit from a diverse selection of flowering plants, with staggered bloom times throughout the bee foraging seasons (Aronson et al., 2017), as well as undisturbed nesting sites. Low frequency mowing and reduced pesticide usage can also greatly benefit pollinator populations (Blaydes et al., 2021; Russo et al., 2021). As a result of different conservation efforts, it is likely that the benefits to pollinator populations will be greatest in areas with more intensive agriculture and urbanization, which may have declines in their pollinator communities. Additionally, increased pollinator populations in urban, suburban, and industrial areas have the potential to spill over into agricultural and even natural lands (Blitzer et al., 2012). Most of the research in this field has been done in Europe, and to a lesser extent North America, and so more information is needed globally to better plan pollinator conservation schemes effectively. Effective pollinator conservation schemes rely on the coordination of research entomologists, landowners, and other stakeholders (Stout and Dicks, 2022), but they have great potential to mitigate some of the recent pollinator population declines and aid in enhancing pollinator populations in these developed areas.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The manuscript presents research on animals that do not require ethical approval for their study.

Author contributions

OK: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. NJ: Conceptualization, Funding acquisition, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Supervision, Visualization, Writing – review & editing.

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