World Bee Day 2026: A Partnership for People and the Planet

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Every year on 20 May, World Bee Day highlights a simple but essential truth: without pollinators, global food production would be severely disrupted, putting ecosystems, economies, and livelihoods at risk. Bees, butterflies, birds, and other pollinating species play a critical role in maintaining biodiversity, supporting food production, and ensuring ecosystem balance. Their importance is closely linked to global priorities such as SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 15 (Life on Land). The 2026 theme, “Bee Together for People and the Planet – A Partnership That Sustains Us All,” (1) emphasizes the need for collective action to protect pollinators in the face of growing environmental pressures.

In the Greater Caribbean, pollinators are essential to both environmental sustainability and economic resilience. Agriculture across the region depends heavily on pollination services, particularly for crops such as coffee, cocoa, mangoes, citrus fruits, and vegetables. These sectors support rural livelihoods and contribute significantly to local economies and exports. At the same time, the region’s biodiversity-rich ecosystems; forests, coastal zones, and protected areas, rely on pollinators to maintain their ecological functions and regenerative capacity.

Today, environmental pressures such as habitat loss, climate change, and pesticide use are becoming increasingly visible. It is estimated that bees and other pollinators contribute to 35% of global agricultural production, and that around 75% of global food crops depend at least partly on pollinators (2), while nearly 35% of invertebrate pollinators (particularly bees and butterflies) and about 17% of vertebrate pollinators, such as bats, are globally threatened with extinction (3).

In the Greater Caribbean, these challenges are particularly significant given the region’s rich biodiversity and strong dependence on ecosystem services. Latin America and the Caribbean host over 5,000 species of bees, representing around 26% of global bee diversity, highlighting the region’s global importance for pollination systems. Concurrently, up to 80% of crops and wild plants in the region depend on animal pollination, underlining the critical role of pollinators for food security and agricultural productivity (4).

Additionally, rising temperatures and shifting rainfall patterns are disrupting flowering cycles and increasing the frequency of extreme weather events, directly affecting pollinator survival and ecosystem stability. In the Greater Caribbean, this instability threatens key food crops, reduces biodiversity in fragile ecosystems such as tropical forests and coastal zones, and increases the vulnerability of rural communities that depend on agriculture and ecosystem services for their livelihoods. In some areas, these changes are already impacting crop yields and biodiversity, highlighting the urgent need for more sustainable land management and coordinated conservation efforts.

Encouragingly, several initiatives across the Greater Caribbean are working to address these challenges. In Cuba, sustainable and largely organic beekeeping practices have been developed in forested areas, allowing honey production to coexist with biodiversity conservation while limiting chemical exposure (5). The Dominican Republic serves as a model for sustainable apiculture in Latin America and the Caribbean, notably through partnerships supported by FONTAGRO, which promote associative and collaborative models for small-scale beekeepers aimed at strengthening productivity, resilience, and market access (6). These initiatives demonstrate how pollinator protection can be integrated into rural development strategies, supporting both livelihoods and ecosystem health.

Healthy ecosystems remain at the heart of these efforts. Forests, mangroves, agricultural landscapes, and protected areas provide essential habitats and food sources for pollinators. These ecosystems also play a key role in regulating climate, maintaining soil fertility, and supporting water cycles. Protecting and restoring them therefore creates multiple benefits, from strengthening biodiversity to enhancing climate resilience and supporting sustainable food systems.

Within this context, the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) continues to promote regional cooperation on environmental sustainability through its Directorate for Disaster Risk Reduction, Sustainable Tourism, Caribbean Sea and the Environment (DDTCE). By encouraging Member States and Associate Members to integrate biodiversity into development strategies and by supporting ecosystem-based approaches, the ACS plays a pivotal role in advancing coordinated regional responses and contributes to safeguarding natural resources across the Greater Caribbean. Protecting pollinators is part of this broader effort to maintain ecological balance and the environment while supporting sustainable economic development across the region.

On this World Bee Day, the message is clear: protecting pollinators means protecting food systems, ecosystems, and communities. Strengthening partnerships between people and nature that sustain us all is essential to ensuring a more resilient and sustainable future for the Greater Caribbean.

References:

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