



WORLD BEE DAY

| 20th May 2026

Small Pollinators,
Big Impact



Sustaining Biodiversity and Food Security

World Bee Day, observed on May 20, highlights the vital role of bees and other pollinators in biodiversity, agriculture, and food security. It also raises awareness about threats such as climate change, habitat loss, and chemical use, while promoting action to protect pollinators and support sustainable farming.

Watershed Support Services and Activities Network (WASSAN) works with smallholder farmers in rainfed regions to promote crop diversity, ecological farming, and community-led resource management. By supporting millet-based systems, conserving indigenous seeds, and encouraging organic practices, it creates pollinator-friendly landscapes for honey bees. This strengthens climate resilience while enhancing food security, biodiversity, and rural livelihoods.

Honey Bees

Honey bees are small insects that live in groups and help plants thrive by carrying pollen from one flower to another while collecting nectar.

The transfer of pollen, a process essential for the reproduction of many plants, enables crops to produce fruits and seeds.

About 75% of crop diversity and 35% of global food production depend on it.





The World of Bees

With over 20,000 species across the globe, bees are far more diverse than we often imagine. From forests to farmlands, each species plays a unique role in pollination and sustaining ecosystems.

In India, the Indian honey bee (*Apis cerana indica*) is widely used in beekeeping and is a reliable pollinator for crops. The giant rock bee (*Apis dorsata*), the largest of them all, thrives in the wild and is known for its strong pollination power. Similarly, the tiny Asian dwarf bee (*Apis florea*) may be small in size but contributes quietly to ecological balance.

Then there are stingless bees (*Melipona irridipennis*), or dammer bees, which produce nutrient-rich honey and can access flowers that other bees cannot.

Alongside these native species, the European honey bee (*Apis mellifera*), an introduced species has become central to modern beekeeping, contributing nearly 75% of India's honey production.

Together, this rich diversity of bees keeps our ecosystems thriving and our food systems alive.

Why Bees Matter?

Without bees, crops such as fruits, vegetables, and nuts would decline, threatening biodiversity and global food supplies.

Bees pollinate over 80% of wild flowering plants, helping maintain biodiversity and support forest regeneration. They sustain wildlife habitats, improve crop yield and quality, and enable diverse cropping systems.

Diverse rainfed farms = more bees, better harvests





Did You Know?



Without pollinators, ecosystems can collapse due to disrupted plant reproduction.

No bees = No biodiversity = No food security.

Crops in Rainfed Areas That Thrive Because of Bees

Millets: Millets are largely self-pollinated crops, yet bees sustain the biodiversity that keeps millet farming resilient, nutritious, and ecologically vibrant.

Pulses: Pigeon pea, green gram, and black gram flower more and form fuller pods.

Oilseeds: Mustard, sesame, and niger yield more oil and higher returns.

Vegetables: Pumpkin, gourds, cucumber, brinjal, and chilli depend on bees for proper fruit formation.

Fruits (Farm + Forest): Mango, guava, custard apple, and jujube grow bigger, tastier, and more abundant.

Forest & Wild Foods: Mahua, tamarind, and jamun support both nutrition and livelihoods through bee activity.

In rainfed landscapes, bees connect crops, forests, and food systems.

From fields to forests, bees make our food richer, more diverse, and more reliable.

Food Security

Bees play a vital role in keeping our plates full. By pollinating fruits, vegetables, and pulses, they support nutritious diets while helping farms stay productive in rainfed areas facing uncertain and changing climate.



Livelihood Security

For rural and tribal communities, bees are a source of income as much as they are a part of nature. Forest honey collection contributes to household earnings, while beekeeping offers a low-cost livelihood option.



Medicinal value

Beyond food, bees contribute to health and healing. Honey has long been valued for its nutritional and immunity-boosting properties, while beeswax and propolis are widely used in traditional medicine.



Cultural value

Bees are deeply woven into cultural traditions and indigenous knowledge systems. From honey gathering practices to seasonal understanding of flowering cycles, they are part of a living heritage that connects communities to their landscapes.



In rainfed cultures, bees are co-inhabitants of the ecosystem.

Threats in Rainfed Areas

- Climate change → erratic rainfall, shifting flowering
- Chemical farming → pesticide exposure
- Monocropping → loss of floral diversity
- Deforestation → habitat loss
- Knowledge loss → Decline in traditional practices



40% of Pollinators at Risk: Why It Matters for Rainfed Regions



- Lower crop yields
- Poor seed formation
- Reduced nutrition
- Loss of rural incomes
- Weakening ecosystems

Way forward

- Promote diverse cropping system
- Shift to chemical-free farming
- Protect forests and commons
- Support community beekeeping
- Revive indigenous knowledge

**When we protect bees,
we safeguard our food, farmers, and future.**

Stories from the Field

On the eve of World Bee Day, our team published a series of stories across digital media platforms. From Odisha to Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Rajasthan, the stories highlight how tribal and pastoral communities are protecting and nurturing honey bees through generations of traditional knowledge.



WORLD BEE DAY 2026: IN NORTHEAST INDIA, THE DISAPPEARANCE OF BEES SIGNALS A DEEPER ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

Monuhar Pegu,
20.05.2026, Down To Earth

Across Northeast India, declining bees reveal ecological damage from monocultures, chemicals, and disappearing indigenous Jhum systems.

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WORLD BEE DAY 2026: HOW ODISHA FARMER MANAS RANJAN JENA BUILT A THRIVING APIARY

Pratyusa Kumar Panda,
20.05.2026, Down to Earth

After repeated dairy farming losses, a young farmer from Odisha's Ganjam rebuilt his life through beekeeping.

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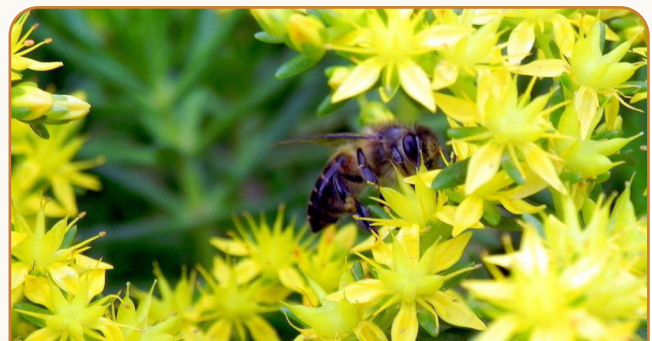


WORLD BEE DAY 2026: THE SCIENTIST HELPING INDIA'S FOREST COMMUNITIES PROTECT WILD BEES

Aniket Likhari,
20.05.2026, Down To Earth

From Vidarbha to eastern India, Gopal Paliwal helps communities protect wild bees and harvest honey sustainably.

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WORLD BEE DAY: HOW INDIA'S HERDERS SUSTAIN POLLINATORS, BIODIVERSITY AND FRAGILE COMMONS

Abhijit Mohanty,
20.05.2026, Scroll

Across the country, pastoralist communities are sustaining wild bee habitats through mobility, biodiversity conservation and traditional ecological knowledge.

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In Amahator village of Nagaland's Kiphire district, 55-year-old farmer Sethsala Langki integrates beekeeping with orchard farming to support biodiversity and strengthen her livelihood.

Why Pollination Must Be Central to India's Natural Farming Transition

Bees and pollinators are essential to agricultural productivity, biodiversity, and climate resilience, yet remain neglected in policy planning.

- Managed pollination has shown significant yield improvements in crops such as coffee, mustard, and sunflower without increasing chemical inputs.
- India's natural farming transition should integrate pollination services as a key ecological infrastructure.
- Government support is needed for pollination-as-a-service models through FPOs, financing, and agricultural programmes.
- Bee health and pollinator presence should be included as measurable indicators under natural farming and ecosystem restoration efforts.
- Pollinator-friendly farming can strengthen India's sustainable agriculture exports while improving long-term farm resilience.





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