

# OH honey!





**PHOTO ESSAY BY PAUL BEUTEL**  
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Float like a butterfly. Sting like a bee. Shoo fly; don't bother me. Insects can delight and terrify. By far the most diverse creatures on the planet; if an insect isn't regarded as a pest to be exterminated it is largely ignored. But we do so at our peril. Every buzzing, crawling, digging and hovering bug plays a vital role in our ecosystem. And according to entomologists and ecologists, insects are vanishing at alarming rates.

Insects are part of nearly every food chain. There is a direct correlation between the demise of insects and a decline in bird, bat and fish populations. Insects help decompose the dung of grazing animals to unlock nutrients that fertilise our soils. Tunnelling insects aerate the ground to help soil retain moisture. This prevents productive lands from becoming barren and stops arid regions expanding. Predatory insects can reduce our use of toxic pesticides, protecting our waterways and saving the agricultural sector millions of dollars.

Pollinators, like bees, are arguably the most vital of all insects. The majority of food consumed by humans relies on pollination. Without pollinators, crops can't reproduce, and animals and humans lose key food sources.

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So what's behind this insect decline? Humans are. Increased use of pesticides, air pollution, urban sprawl, deforestation, drought and bushfires.

In the Bundaberg Region, there is a growing number of organisations, businesses and residents who are doing their bit to support bee populations. St Luke's Anglican School and the Windmill Café at Bargara, for example, both host small native bee hives in their gardens.

Hobby farmers like Denise Powell have become fascinated by bee keeping, after she discovered a hive in the wall of her weatherboard home. Rather than kill the bees, she enlisted the help of Tim Pyle to create an innovative device to draw the bees out and rehome them. Denise and Tim have since joined forces to create Bee Allured Honey, a honey and bee keeping supplies business.

And then there are the likes of Len Shaxson from Bonna Apiary; professional apiarists who supply hives to farmers and garden nurseries to enhance pollination.

Watching Len and Tim at work, checking their hives on a local strawberry farm, is serene. In contrast to the busy bees they serve to protect, Len and Tim have a calming ease about them. Their knowledge is remarkable. Their passion is infectious.

Bee keeping is altruistic artistry. It requires instinct and science to keep sensitive colonies alive, pollinating our food and producing golden honey.

Locally, at least, we are working hard to find equilibrium. More home gardeners are planting flowering plants that attract birds and bees. Our farmers understand the direct correlation between bee populations and crop yields. What could be sweeter than that?