

# Flowers Need Pollinators, Pollinators Need Flowers

One of the functions that animals—insects, birds, bats and even squirrels and some small mammals—fill in the natural world is that of “pollinator.” Think of it as a job title and you wouldn’t be too far off the mark—the “job” of a pollinator is to find flowers, visit them, and carry pollen from one to the other.

only is there less time to do the job—’cause who likes to work in the rain—but the flowers themselves are often rendered “less desirable.” Think of yourself, picking fruit at the market, and only wanting the best looking, unbruised, unmarred fruit and you can understand the importance of bright, unblemished flowers.



*A Ruby-Throated Hummingbird, Archilochus colubris, visits a Turk's Cap Hibiscus, Malvaviscus arboreus, and gets a white head for its trouble.*

Of course, flowers pay wages for the service by offering rewards that make it attractive for the pollinators to visit the flower. Now don't get me started on the role of advertising in nature and the fact that most of the social structure that we think makes us better or different from other animals/nature is pure hogwash (opinionated cuss, ain't I?). Suffice to say, the end result is that they do visit flowers and do carry pollen between them.

Now, consider what effect this wet year is having on pollinators. Not

Consider then, from the perspective of the unselected fruit at the market, the dilemma of the rain-damaged flower. The plant has put a lot of energy and resources into flowers (that is, they cost a lot to make) with the understanding that a pollinator will come by and do its job. Unvisited flowers are a waste of time, energy and resources, from the plants point of view.

So, it's a give-and-take world where pollinators need flowers almost as much as flowers need pollinators. What's most interesting to a guy

like me is that flowers actually need—and employ— specific kinds of pollinators. For example, daisy or aster-like flowers have many small flowers with short tubes and provide a landing platform that is perfect for most flies, bees and other small insects.

Tubular flowers, though, are often held to the side and need pollinators that can hover, with anthers and a stigma that stick out to contact various parts of a pollinator's body while the long tongue or proboscis of a hummingbird or butterfly probes deep within the tube.

Flowers on these plants are usually bright red or yellow but white tubular flowers, especially those that are night-scented, employ the night-shift: the moths or bats.

This past week, between downbursts (thinking “when will this rain end?” when I know that as soon as it does we'll be asking “when will we get some rain?”), I watched some hummers visiting the brilliant red Turk's Caps and was amazed at how persistent the birds were at opening flowers, even those that were obviously rain-damaged.

Good workers, those hummers!