

A Carnival of Insects

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Imagine an eight year old girl, sitting under an apple tree in her garden, in the intense heat of a midsummer's day during her school holidays.

She is totally engrossed in her book and unaware that she is perspiring heavily in the heat – and attracting butterflies to feed on the salt accumulating on her skin as the moisture dries.

Suddenly a machine erupts on the neighbouring land and as she jumps with surprise and shock, a cloud of butterflies soars around her head.

Brightly marked Peacocks, Red Admirals, Commas, Marbled Whites, Painted Ladies, Yellow Brimstone and many other varieties, all amaze and captivate her.

She was used to seeing the butterflies in the flower borders, generally accompanied by a chorus of bees humming, as they competed with the butterflies for the nectar promised in the flowers' scent. To be touched by a cloud of butterflies, was an unforgettable experience!

Wasps, too, produced a loud humming much less welcome than that of the bees. It warned diners to resist or risk being stung as wasps tried to share the goodies on the picnic rug or table. Clouds of aphids were also unpopular as they smothered car windscreens during summer evenings, obscuring vision and forcing drivers to stop every 25-30 miles to remove them with a sponge. How we longed to be rid of them!

So, is it not strange that, more than forty years later, we yearn to see these tiresome insects again? Sadly, over the last thirty years we have seen a devastating decline in all our insect populations – and this is now compromising our ability to grow our food.

We desperately need bees and butterflies to pollinate our plants and enable seeds to be reproduced for the following seasons. Without this cycle of reproduction, the plants on which the bees and caterpillars depend to feed and lay their eggs, will be lost. Aphids also make important contributions - to the health and structure of our soil and the lifecycle of our bird population. They also nourish ants, who farm the aphids to feed their young. Ants are a lynch pin in preserving the structure and health of our soil. Aphids also feed the chicks of the tit population thus protecting our crops from damage. Surveys, however, reveal the decline in our bird population as chicks die from food shortages aggravated by climate change. Lethal levels of air pollution kill insects and humans in addition. The widespread use of insecticides and herbicides on our farms and gardens further attacks both our insect population and their host plants.

So, the time has come for change. We must do things differently and much more thoughtfully. In paragraph 67 of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis quotes from Genesis 2:15, where he says,

" Each community can take from the bounty of the Earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations." He continues - in paragraph 68 - This responsibility for God's earth means that human beings, endowed with intelligence, must respect the laws of nature and the delicate equilibria existing between the creatures of the world...."

The time for a policy for Future Generations has come. If humanity and the glory of Creation are to survive each one of us must review our lifestyle and expectations,