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The effects of honeybees
(*Apis mellifera*) on the
biodiversity of manuka
(*Leptospermum scoparium*)
patches

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The effects of honeybees on the biodiversity of manuka patches

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ABSTRACT

Honeybees (*Apis mellifera*) are important pollinators of many plant species and are employed globally for crop and honey production. However, little is known about the effects of this species on native pollinator and plant species in areas to which they have been introduced; and previous research has not been able to reach a general consensus as to the type of impact honeybees have on pollination systems. In addition to the effects of exotic pollinators, the loss and fragmentation of natural habitats is also of major concern to the continuing diversity of pollinators and plant populations.

Here, the impact of honeybee density on other pollinator guilds, and levels of remaining pollen and nectar standing crop among 18 patches of the New Zealand native shrub – manuka (*Leptospermum scoparium*) is examined at three different regions within the North Island. The same sites were also used to test the reproductive capabilities of manuka and subsequent pollen limitation among patches. A further 11 sites were utilised to examine biodiversity via intercept and pitfall traps within manuka patches, and the patch variables driving taxa composition.

Large fly (Diptera \geq 5 mm) abundance was negatively correlated with honeybee abundance and instances of physical disturbance of large flies by honeybees were observed. There was no significant correlation between honeybee abundance and other pollinator guilds. Nectar was a limiting resource for both honeybees and large flies, whereas, pollen was not a limiting resource among any of the major pollinating insect guilds. Pollination treatments revealed that manuka is partially self-compatible, but relies more heavily on cross pollination for higher yields of capsule and seed set. Pollen limitation did not occur significantly at any of the sites. A total of 159 Coleoptera, 125 Diptera, 131 Hymenoptera morphospecies, and 50 other groups of

taxa from various orders were collected among sites. Invertebrate richness was higher at lower altitudes and litter invertebrate richness was significantly higher with an increase in the proportion of manuka cover. There were distinct differences in taxa composition between the three regions, with plant community composition and altitude the most significant factors. Patch size also played a part, but a lack of overall variation in patch sizes may understate the effect this has on insect composition.

Overall, honeybees are competing for nectar resources and displacing large flies as a consequence; however, capsule and seed set among manuka patches did not significantly suffer as a consequence. Regional variation in patch characteristics such as altitude, plant community composition, patch size, proportion manuka cover, and plant evenness appear to be influencing insect composition found within manuka patches to varying degrees. Further investigation into the impact of patch size and patch connectivity is also warranted.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	v
Acknowledgements	vii
1. Introduction	1
1.1 The introduction of exotic insects, honeybees, and New Zealand pollinators	3
1.1.1 Introduction of exotic insect species	3
1.1.2 Origin and global spread of the honeybee <i>Apis mellifera</i>	3
1.1.3 General foraging ecology of honeybees	4
1.1.4 New Zealand pollinator fauna	4
1.1.5 The current status of honeybee abundance	6
1.2 Literature review	
1.2.1 The effects of honeybees on other pollinators/insects	7
1.2.2 The effects of honeybees and other exotics on plant reproduction	8
1.2.3 Effects of land use and habitat disturbance on pollinator biodiversity	9
1.3 Manuka as a suitable system to study	11
1.4 Research sites and objectives	12
2. The impact of honeybee density on pollinator guild abundance and available resources	15
2.1 Introduction	17
2.2 Methods	
2.2.1 Habitat variables and study sites	20
2.2.2 Behavioural observations	20

2.2.3	Insect vouchers	21
2.2.4	Nectar extraction	22
2.2.5	Pollen collection, extraction, and dilution	22
2.2.6	Pollen counts	23
2.2.7	Data analysis	23
2.3	Results	
2.3.1	Behavioural observations	25
2.3.2	Nectar and pollen standing crops	30
2.4	Discussion	34
3.	Pollination capabilities and pollen limitation among patches of manuka	
	(<i>Leptospermum scoparium</i>)	39
3.1	Introduction	41
3.2	Methods	
3.2.1	Pollination requirements	45
3.2.2	Pollen limitation	46
3.2.3	Capsule and seed set	46
3.2.4	Data analysis	47
3.3	Results	
3.3.1	Bagged flower treatments	48
3.3.2	Pollen limitation	50
3.4	Discussion	55

4. The effect of manuka patch variables on taxa diversity and composition	59
4.1 Introduction	61
4.2 Methods	
4.2.1 Study sites	65
4.2.2 Intercept traps	65
4.2.3 Pitfall traps	66
4.2.4 Sample sorting	67
4.2.5 Data analysis	67
4.3 Results	69
4.3.1 Intercept traps	70
4.3.2 Intercept trap diversity	72
4.3.3 Intercept combined trap ordination	77
4.3.4 Intercept combined trap ordination for Tongariro only	82
4.3.5 Intercept bottom chamber ordination	85
4.3.6 Intercept top chamber ordination	90
4.3.7 Pitfall trap diversity	93
4.3.8 Pitfall trap ordination	98
4.3.9 Pitfall trap ordination – Tongariro only	101
4.4 Discussion	103
5. Discussion	109
5.1 Relationships within pollination systems and how it applies to the reproductive capabilities of manuka	111
5.2 Impact of honeybees within manuka patches	113
5.3 Effects of patch characteristics on invertebrate diversity and insect family composition	116

5.4	Future applications	118
5.5	Conclusion	119
References		123
Appendices		
	Appendix 1	137
	Appendix 2	
	Appendix 3	
	Appendix 4	