

Original Research Article

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Seasonal dynamics of *Apis* bees and its floral interaction in Agricultural and Horticultural ecosystem at PAJANCOA and RI campus, Karaikal, India

T. Yuvasri^{ID}* and M. Kandibane

Department of Agricultural Entomology, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru College of Agriculture and Research Institute, Karaikal, Puducherry, India

*Corresponding author

ABSTRACT

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The study was conducted during October 2024 – June 2025 in Agricultural and Horticultural ecosystem at PAJANCOA and RI, Karaikal. The main of the study was to evaluate the diversity of seasonal and temporal dynamics of *Apis* bees namely *Apis dorsata*, *Apis cerana indica* and *Apis florea*. To record their floral interactions, and construct floral calendar about nectar and pollen sources in different months, which are vital for effective beekeeping, crop pollination and conservation of bees. Major honey flow period recorded during February to May. *A. dorsata* activity was more followed by *A. cerana indica* and *A. florea*. During study, Recorded a total of 22 flowering plants in Agricultural and 21 plants in Horticultural ecosystem. Plant pollinator interaction was stronger in Horticultural ecosystem when compared to Agricultural ecosystem.

Introduction

Pollination is the most essential mechanism in fertilization, seed production, and plant reproduction by transfer of pollen to the stigma (Kevan, 1999). Pollination was completed by different biotic (Insects, Birds and Animals) and Abiotic factors (Wind, Water) (Day and Hannah, 2015). Among them insect pollinators like bees, butterflies, beetles and flies that drive global food security and ecosystem health by facilitating the reproduction of over 80 per cent of flowering plants (Maggi *et al.*, 2024). Bee-pollinated flowers represent

the most widespread pollination syndrome, termed melittophily. With over 25,000 bee species documented worldwide, they collectively provide pollination services to nearly 88 per cent of all flowering plants (Ollerton, 2017). Honeybees provide many useful products like honey, pollen, royal jelly. In addition to that it plays invaluable role in cross pollinating the economic crops like Apples, Sunflowers, Cucurbits etc., China contributed an estimated 30–50 per cent of the global economic value generated through pollination, making it the leading beneficiary among pollination-dependent nations such as India, the United States, Brazil, Japan,

and Turkey (Lautenbach *et al.*, 2012). Globally, *Apis mellifera* Linnaeus is considered the primary pollinator, offering critical services to a wide range of crops of economic importance (Hung *et al.*, 2018). In addition, native Indian honey bees such as *Apis cerana indica*, *Apis dorsata*, and *Apis florea* serve as vital pollinators, supporting the reproductive success of wild flora and enhancing crop yields. Across Pakistan and much of South and Southeast Asia, the giant honey bee (*A. dorsata*) plays a vital role in crop pollination (Crane *et al.*, 2023). *A. cerana*, commonly known as the Indian honey bee, is native to Asia and has been valued for honey and pollination services for thousands of years (Patel *et al.*, 2025). The dwarf honey bee (*A. florea*) holds fundamental importance as a pollinator, sustaining the reproduction of numerous tropical plants and flowers (Soman and Chawda, 1996). Pollinator–plant relationships play a pivotal role in the reproductive processes of flowering plants, supporting terrestrial biodiversity and agricultural productivity (Byers, 2017). Pollinators are significantly impacted by various anthropogenic and environmental stressors, such as habitat degradation, extensive monoculture cultivation, pesticide exposure, environmental pollution, the spread of pathogens, and the extensive effects of climate change. Conservation of pollinators need to study the diversity of species, foraging pattern, habitat preferences, and interaction with other plants in floral communities (Kisvarga *et al.*, 2025)

Materials and Methods

The present investigation on the foraging patterns of *Apis* bees in Agricultural and Horticultural ecosystem was carried out during October 2024 to June 2025 at Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru College of Agriculture and Research Institute (PAJANCOA and RI), Karaikal, U. T. of Puducherry, India. The study area situated at 10°52' North latitude and 79°52' East longitude, with an elevation of 4 meters above mean sea level. The bees were collected from different flowering plants at weekly intervals by using different methods *viz.*, visual observation and net sweeping. Aerial net was most commonly used to collect bee pollinators flying over the inflorescences. Visual observation was used to document the number of bee pollinators on the inflorescences per m² was recorded for 5 minutes in the case of field crops, vegetable crops, tree crops and weeds during foraging hours (6.00 am to 5.00 pm). The details were used to prepare crop calendar and plant – pollinator interaction using bipartite graph. Correlation analyses were carried

out to find out the relationship between *Apis* bees and meteorological parameters *viz.*, maximum and minimum temperature, relative humidity (RH), rainfall (RF), wind speed and sunshine.

Result and Discussion

Apis bees and associated flower crops

A total of three *Apis* bees recorded namely *Apis dorsata*, *Apis cerana indica* and *Apis florea* (Fig.1) at PANJCOA and RI campus, Karaikal. It belongs to the order Hymenopteran order and Apidae family. During study the bee were recorded to forage for nectar and pollen sources in 22 flowering plants in Agricultural ecosystem and 21 in Horticultural ecosystem. *A. dorsata* activity was more in agricultural ecosystem whereas *A. cerana indica* and *A. florea* foraging activity was higher in horticultural ecosystem. Hemalatha *et al.*, (2018) recorded a total of 183 plants belonging to 76 families which acted as both nectar and pollen sources for *A. cerana indica* at Madurai, Tamil Nadu. In Karnataka, Raghunandan and Basavarajappa, (2014) registered a total of 252 flowering plants belong to 74 families which acted as a food resource for *A. dorsata*.

Bee activity was low during *Rabi* season (October – January) due to rainfall and low availability of nectar and pollen sources. After monsoon, the honey flow period started from end of February. Floral sources such as Pungam (*Pongamia pinnata*), Copper pod tree (*Peltophorum pterocarpum*), Asian spiderflower (*Cleome viscosa*), Bittergourd (*Momordica charantia*), and sesame (*Sesamum indicum*) provided nutrient rich nectar and pollen (Table 1 and 2). This resource availability supported bee population and foraging activity increased. Similar to the findings Vidhya *et al.*, (2019) reported that *A. florea* preferred majorly weed plants like *Trianthema portulacastrum* and *Alternanthera sessilis*.

Temporal Dynamics of *Apis* bee activity

During the study period, weekly surveys were carried out to record the population of bees in both ecosystems. *Apis dorsata* activity started to increase from March and peak activity was noticed during April month (14th standard week) which coincides with the honey flow period (Fig. 2). *A. cerana indica* and *A. florea* activity was notably increase after March, provided a constant foraging activity and ensured stability in the ecosystem.

Table.1 Bees and Their Associated Floral Resources in Agricultural Ecosystems

| SL No. | Crop Name | Scientific Name | Family | Present Month(s) | Pollinator Scientific Name(s) | Nectar/Pollen/ Nectar +Pollen |
|--------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|-------------------|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | Maize | <i>Zea mays</i> | Poaceae | March | <i>A. dorsata</i> | Pollen |
| 2 | Sesame | <i>Sesamum indicum</i> | Pedaliaceae | March–May | <i>A. dorsata, A. cerana indica</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 3 | Sunflower | <i>Helianthus annuus</i> | Asteraceae | March | <i>A. dorsata</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 4 | Finger millet | <i>Eleusine coracana</i> | Poaceae | April | <i>A. dorsata</i> | Pollen |
| 5 | Daincha | <i>Sesbania aculeata</i> | Fabaceae | Nov–Dec | <i>A. dorsata</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 6 | Sunhemp | <i>Crotalaria juncea</i> | Fabaceae | April | <i>A. dorsata</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 7 | Copper pod tree | <i>Peltophorum pterocarpum</i> | Fabaceae | March | <i>A. dorsata, A. cerana indica, A. florea</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 8 | Pungam | <i>Pongamia pinnata</i> | Fabaceae | March–April | <i>A. dorsata, A. cerana indica, A. florea</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 9 | Coconut | <i>Cocos nucifera</i> | Arecaceae | Dec–Feb, May | <i>A. dorsata, A. cerana indica</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 10 | Rain tree | <i>Samanea saman</i> | Fabaceae | April | <i>A. dorsata</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 11 | Flame of forest | <i>Butea monosperma</i> | Fabaceae | March | <i>A. dorsata</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 12 | Jamun tree | <i>Syzygium cumini</i> | Myrtaceae | April | <i>A. florea</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 13 | Blue Rats Tail | <i>Stachytarpheta jamaicensis</i> | Verbenaceae | Dec | <i>A. dorsata</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 14 | Sessile Joyweed | <i>Alternanthera sessilis</i> | Amaranthaceae | Dec–Jan, May | <i>A. dorsata</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 15 | Water Primrose | <i>Ludwigia perennis</i> | Onagraceae | Nov–Dec | <i>A. dorsata</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 16 | Indian Hydrolea | <i>Hydrolea zeylanica</i> | Hydroleaceae | Dec | <i>A. dorsata, A. cerana indica</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 17 | Maderaspatanus Cucumber | <i>Mukia maderaspatana</i> | Cucurbitaceae | Dec | <i>A. dorsata</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 18 | Indian Catmint | <i>Anisomeles indica</i> | Lamiaceae | Dec–Jan | <i>A. dorsata</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 19 | Coatbuttons | <i>Tridax procumbens</i> | Asteraceae | Oct, Dec–Mar, May | <i>A. dorsata</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 20 | Flat-Stemmed Buttonweed | <i>Borreria latifolia</i> | Rubiaceae | Oct–Dec | <i>A. dorsata</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 21 | Giant Pigweed | <i>Trianthema portulacastrum</i> | Aizoaceae | April | <i>A. dorsata, A. cerana indica, A. florea</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 22 | Asian Spiderflower | <i>Cleome viscosa</i> | Cleomaceae | Dec, Mar–Apr | <i>A. dorsata, A. cerana indica</i> | Nectar +Pollen |

Table.2 Bees and Their Associated Floral Resources in Horticultural Ecosystem

| SL NO. | Crop Name | Scientific Name | Family | Present Month(s) | Pollinator Scientific Name(s) | Nectar/Pollen /Nectar +Pollen |
|--------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Cucumber | <i>Cucumis sativus</i> | Cucurbitaceae | Feb–Apr | <i>A. dorsata</i> , <i>A. cerana indica</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 2 | Pumpkin | <i>Cucurbita moschata</i> | Cucurbitaceae | Mar | <i>A. dorsata</i> , <i>A. cerana indica</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 3 | Bittergourd | <i>Momordica charantia</i> | Cucurbitaceae | Jan–Mar | <i>A. dorsata</i> , <i>A. cerana indica</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 4 | Chilly | <i>Capsicum annuum</i> | Solanaceae | Feb–Mar | <i>A. dorsata</i> , <i>A. cerana indica</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 5 | Brinjal | <i>Solanum melongena</i> | Solanaceae | Feb–Mar | <i>A. dorsata</i> | Pollen |
| 6 | Sponge gourd | <i>Luffa cylindrica</i> | Cucurbitaceae | Apr | <i>A. dorsata</i> , <i>A. cerana indica</i> , <i>A. florea</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 7 | Guava | <i>Psidium guajava</i> | Myrtaceae | Mar | <i>A. dorsata</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 8 | Mango | <i>Mangifera indica</i> | Anacardiaceae | Nov–Dec | <i>A. florea</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 9 | Sandalwood tree | <i>Santalum album</i> | Santalaceae | Oct–Nov, Mar | <i>A. dorsata</i> , <i>A. cerana indica</i> , <i>A. florea</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 10 | Copper pod tree | <i>Peltophorum pterocarpum</i> | Fabaceae | Mar–May | <i>A. dorsata</i> , <i>A. cerana indica</i> , <i>A. florea</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 11 | Pungam | <i>Pongamia pinnata</i> | Fabaceae | Mar–Apr | <i>A. dorsata</i> , <i>A. cerana indica</i> , <i>A. florea</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 12 | Coconut | <i>Cocos nucifera</i> | Arecaceae | Nov | <i>A. cerana indica</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 13 | Banana | <i>Musa paradisiaca</i> | Musaceae | Feb | <i>A. cerana indica</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 14 | Yellow bell | <i>Tecoma stans</i> | Bignoniaceae | Oct–Nov | <i>A. dorsata</i> , <i>A. cerana indica</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 15 | Sessile Joyweed | <i>Alternanthera sessilis</i> | Amaranthaceae | Nov | <i>A. florea</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 16 | Water Primrose | <i>Ludwigia perennis</i> | Onagraceae | Nov | <i>A. cerana indica</i> , <i>A. florea</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 17 | Flat-Stemmed Buttonweed | <i>Borreria latifolia</i> | Rubiaceae | Oct | <i>A. florea</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 18 | Axillary Cyanotis | <i>Cyanotis axillaris</i> | Commelinaceae | Nov–Jan | <i>A. dorsata</i> , <i>A. cerana indica</i> , <i>A. florea</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 19 | Giant Pigweed | <i>Trianthema portulacastrum</i> | Aizoaceae | Apr | <i>A. dorsata</i> , <i>A. cerana indica</i> , <i>A. florea</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 20 | Erect Spiderling | <i>Boerhavia erecta</i> | Nyctaginaceae | Feb–Mar | <i>A. cerana indica</i> | Nectar +Pollen |
| 21 | Asian Spiderflower | <i>Cleome viscosa</i> | Cleomaceae | Jan–Apr | <i>A. dorsata</i> , <i>A. cerana indica</i> | Nectar +Pollen |

Table.3 Network and Group level plant pollinator interaction

| Parameter | Agricultural | Horticultural | Finding |
|-------------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Network-Level | | | |
| Connectance | 0.485 | 0.635 | Horti more densely connected. |
| Modularity Q | 0.307 | 0.229 | Agri slightly more modular. |
| Nestedness (NODF) | 9.36 | 60.17 | Stronger nestedness in horti. |
| Shannon diversity | 3.466 | 3.689 | Higher diversity in horti. |
| Robustness HL | 0.838 | 0.906 | Pollinators more resilient in horti. |
| Group- Level | | | |
| Number of species HL | 22 | 21 | Similar pollinator richness. |
| Mean number of links HL | 1.81 | 2.25 | Pollinators more linked in horti. |
| Cluster coefficient HL | 0.604 | 0.750 | Stronger clustering in horti pollinators. |
| Robustness LL | 0.324 | 0.383 | Plants more robust in horti. |
| Partner diversity HL | 0.48 | 0.74 | Pollinators more diverse in horti. |

Table.4 Network and Group level plant pollinator interaction

| Species | Degree | Strength | Nested Rank | Betweenness | Partner Diversity |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|-------------|-------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Higher level Species (Agri) | | | | | |
| Copper pod tree | 3 | 0.440 | 0.00 | 0.33 | 1.099 |
| Pungam | 3 | 0.440 | 0.05 | 0.33 | 1.099 |
| Giant pigweed | 3 | 0.440 | 0.10 | 0.33 | 1.099 |
| Sesame / Coconut / Hydrolea / Asian spiderflower | 2 | 0.190 | 0.14 - 0.29 | 0.00 | 0.693 |
| Most crops and weeds (Maize, Sunflower, Finger millet, etc.) | 1 | 0.048–0.25 | 0.33 - 1.00 | 0.00 | 0.000 |
| Lower-level Species (Agri) | | | | | |
| <i>Apis dorsata</i> | 21 | 17.0 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 3.045 |
| <i>Apis cerana indica</i> | 7 | 3.0 | 0.50 | 0.00 | 1.946 |
| <i>Apis florea</i> | 4 | 2.0 | 1.00 | 0.00 | 1.386 |
| Higher level Species (Horti) | | | | | |
| Sponge gourd / Sandalwood / Copper pod / Pungam / Cyanotis / Giant pigweed | 3 | 0.234 | 0.00 - 0.25 | 0.135 | 1.099 |
| Cucumber / Pumpkin / Bittergourd / Chilly / Waterprimrose | 2 | 0.134–0.163 | 0.30 - 0.55 | 0.016 - 0.094 | 0.693 |
| Brinjal / Guava / Mango / Coconut / Banana / Sessile Joyweed / Buttonweed / Erect spiderling | 1 | 0.06–0.10 | 0.65 - 1.00 | 0.00 | 0.000 |
| Lower-level Species (Horti) | | | | | |
| <i>Apis cerana indica</i> | 16 | 8.5 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 2.773 |
| <i>Apis dorsata</i> | 14 | 7.0 | 0.50 | 0.00 | 2.639 |
| <i>Apis florea</i> | 10 | 5.5 | 1.00 | 0.00 | 2.303 |

Table.5 Correlation between *Apis* bees and weather parameters

| Species / Weather | Maximum Temperature | Minimum Temperature | Morning RH | Evening RH | Rainfall | Wind | Sunshine |
|-------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------|------------|----------|-------|----------|
| <i>A. dorsata</i> | 0.18 | 0.08 | -0.02 | -0.19 | -0.22 | -0.04 | 0.23 |
| <i>A. cerana indica</i> | 0.58** | 0.31 | -0.30 | -0.49** | -0.51** | 0.22 | 0.47** |
| <i>A. florea</i> | 0.22 | 0.19 | -0.20 | -0.27 | -0.20 | 0.12 | 0.24 |

** = significant at 1%

Fig.1 *Apis* bee pollinators in PAJANCOA and RI, Karaikal



Figure.2 Temporal Dynamics of *Apis* Bee Activity

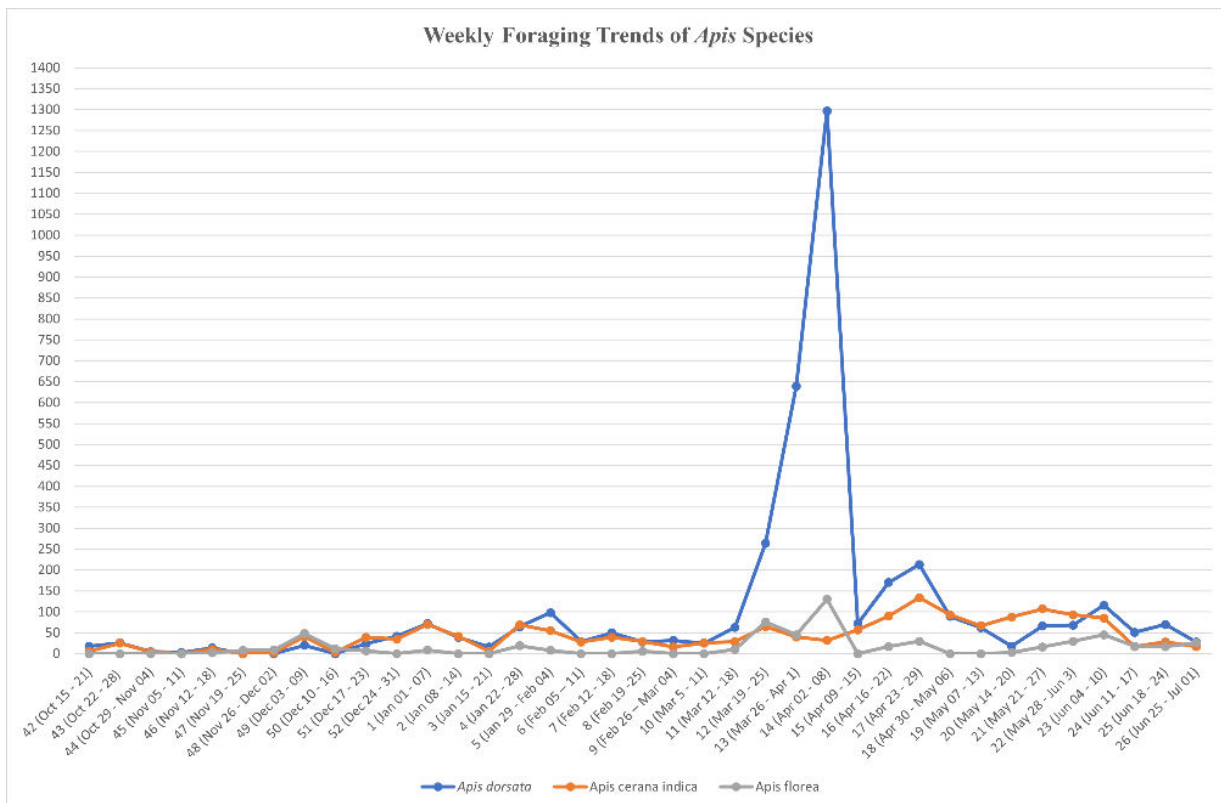
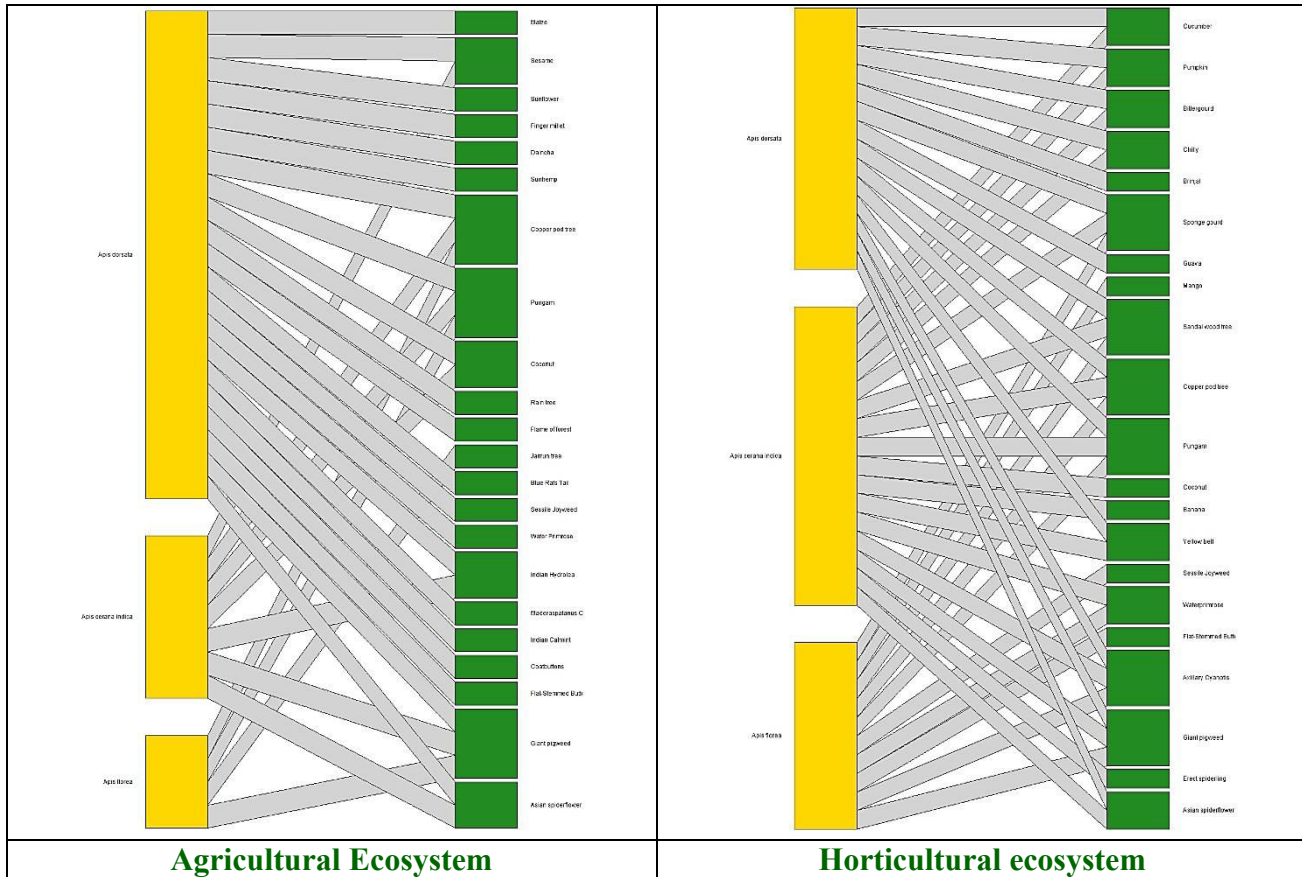


Fig.3 Plant- pollinator network



Lazar *et al.*, (2023) reported that bee activity increased from February -May during honey flow season and reduced activity was noticed during dearth period (June – July) in Puducherry which corroborates with the current findings.

Network, group and species level analysis

The comparison of network and group level parameters revealed that notable structural differences in insect interaction between Agricultural and Horticultural ecosystem were observed (Table 3) (Fig 2). At the network level, horticultural ecosystems show higher connectance (0.635), stronger nestedness (60.17), greater Shannon diversity (3.689), and more resilient pollinators (Robustness High Level (HL) = 0.906), when compared to agricultural ecosystem. The present finding is in support with the fact of Deeksha *et al.*, (2022) who found that cultivated land site has higher connectance (0.23) when compared to un cultivated area. At the group level, both systems have equal pollinator richness,

but horticultural pollinators were more linked (2.25), show stronger clustering (0.75), and greater partner diversity (0.74). Plants were also more robust in horticulture (Robustness Low Level (LL) = 0.383). Vinotha (2024) reported that the integrated farming system exhibited higher mean numbers of partner HL (Phase I: 3.59; Phase II: 2.73) compared to the conventional farm (2.08). This aligns with findings from similar studies, where horticultural ecosystems enriched by a diverse array of flowering crops which tend to support more interconnected ecological networks.

Species level analysis showed that agricultural ecosystem comprised fewer hub plants while horticultural ecosystems comprise more hub plants. In agriculture ecosystem, major hub plants were Copper pod tree, Pungam, and Giant pigweed (Degree = 3, Strength = 0.44, Partner diversity = 1.099), while most crops and weeds remain specialists with only one pollinator link (Degree = 1, Strength = 0.048- 0.25) (Table. 4). The pollinator network is dominated by *Apis*

dorsata (Degree = 21, Strength = 17, Diversity = 3.045), followed by *A. cerana indica* as an intermediate and *A. florea* as a specialist. In horticulture ecosystem, hub plants were more numerous (Sponge gourd, Sandalwood, Copper pod, Pungam, Cyanotis, Giant pigweed), with intermediates like cucumber and pumpkin (Degree = 2, Strength = 0.134 - 0.163, Diversity = 0.693), and many fruit trees and weeds as specialists (Degree = 1, Strength = 0.06 - 0.10). The pollinator network is balanced, with *A. cerana indica* as the main hub (Degree = 16, Strength = 8.5, Diversity = 2.773), *A. dorsata* still strong (Degree = 14, Strength = 7, Diversity = 2.639), and *A. florea* acted as a specialist (Degree = 10, Strength = 5.5, Diversity = 2.303). Horticulture ecosystem comprised more hubs when compared to Agriculture, making it structurally more resilient.

Apis bees and its relationship with weather parameters

During study period, October 2024 and June 2025, weather parameters were monitored and correlated with bee activity (Table 5). The analysis revealed that *A. cerana indica* showed a significant positive correlation with Maximum temperature (0.58) and Sunshine (0.47).

According to Paikara and Painkra (2020), Indian bees have a substantial negative link with wind speed (-0.09), evening relative humidity (-0.16), and minimum temperature (-0.75), all of which agree with the current study. *Apis* bees showed positive correlation with Maximum temperature, Minimum temperature and Sunshine. Similar to the above finding, Mohanty *et al.*, (2023) reported a positive correlation between foraging activity of *A. cerana indica* and temperature (Maximum: 0.56; Minimum temperature: 0.63). Thakur *et al.*, (2022) reported that *A. dorsata* recorded positive correlation with temperature (0.76) which correlate with the present study.

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Author Contributions

T. Yuvasri: Investigation, formal analysis, writing—

original draft. M. Kandibane: Validation, methodology, writing—reviewing.

Data Availability

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declarations

Ethical Approval Not applicable.

Consent to Participate Not applicable.

Consent to Publish Not applicable.

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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