

# EuPPollNet: A European database of plant-pollinator networks

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## Abstract

**Motivation:** Pollinators play a crucial role in maintaining Earth’s terrestrial biodiversity and human food production by mediating sexual reproduction for most flowering plants. Indeed, the network of interactions formed by plants and pollinators constitutes the backbone of plant-pollinator community stability and functioning. However, rapid human-induced environmental changes are compromising the long-term persistence of plant-pollinator interaction networks. One of the major challenges for pollinator conservation is the lack of robust generalisable data capturing how plant-pollinator communities are structured across space and time. Here, we present the EuPPollNet database, a fully open and reproducible European-level database containing harmonized taxonomic data on plant-pollinator interactions referenced in both space and time, along with other ecological variables of interest. This database offers an open workflow that allows researchers to track data-curation decisions and edit them according to their preferences. Furthermore, this work assesses the taxonomic and sampling coverage of the database at the European level, and the key structural properties in plant-pollinator networks. We hope this database can facilitate future research aimed to fill in taxonomic, ecological, and geographical data gaps on plant-pollinator interactions, and explore the impacts of global change on plant-pollinator networks to guide future conservation planning for both plant and pollinator species.

**Main Types of Variables Included:** EuPPollNet contains 1,144,371 interactions between plants and pollinators from 1,147 distinct locations (i.e., plant-pollinator networks), which belong to 51 different studies distributed across 17 European countries. In addition, information about sampling methodology, habitat type, bio-climatic region, and further taxonomic rank information for both plant and pollinator species are also provided.

**Spatial location and grain:** The database contains 1,147 different sampling locations from natural and anthropogenic habitats that fall in 5 different bio-climatic regions. All records are geo-referenced and presented in the World Geodetic System 1984 (WGS84).

**Time period and grain:** Species interaction data was recorded between 2004 and 2021. All records are time-referenced and most of the studies documented interactions in a single flowering season (68.63%).

**Major taxa and level of measurement:** The database contains interaction data at the species level for 94.72% of the records, including a total of 1,355 plant and 2,065 pollinator species. The database covers 5.34% of the European species of flowering plants, 33.82% of bees, 26.21% of butterflies, and 33.08% of syrphids species at the European level.

**Software format:** The database was built with the R programming language and is stored as “.rds” and “.csv” formats. The construction of the database is fully reproducible and can be accessed at the following PERMANENT LINKS.

## KEYWORDS

plant-pollinator networks, species interactions, flowering plants, Angiosperms, pollinators, nestedness, connectance

# 1 | INTRODUCTION

Plant-pollinator interactions involve a great diversity of species, largely attributed to their coevolutionary history (Ollerton 2017), and are critically important for terrestrial biodiversity and economic productivity. The synergistic effects of climate change with other global change pressures are threatening worldwide biodiversity (Sala et al. 2000; Bellard et al. 2014), including plant and pollinator species as well as their interactions (Goulson et al. 2015; Settele, Bishop, and Potts 2016; Eichenberg et al. 2021). Under this scenario, the increasing availability of biodiversity data plays a major role in our ecological understanding of species status, trends, and conservation (Heberling et al. 2021; Zattara and Aizen 2021). However, our knowledge of plant and pollinator species and their network of interactions still exhibits major temporal, spatial and taxonomic biases (Archer et al. 2014; Troia and McManamay 2016; Poisot et al. 2021; Marshall et al. 2024), limiting our ability to effectively protect their biodiversity.

Europe is one of the continents with a larger amount of available biodiversity data (Proença et al. 2017), yet still exhibits major gaps (Wetzel et al. 2018; Bennett et al. 2018). While species checklists need to be treated carefully, especially at a macro-ecological scale (Grenié et al. 2023), the growing number of European plant and pollinator checklists (Reverté et al. 2023), along with occurrence data (Zattara and Aizen 2021), is setting a foundation for the conservation of its flora and their pollinators. However, species richness is just one component of biodiversity and documenting the interaction between plants and pollinators is essential for understanding biodiversity change (Jordano 2016). Numerous works have studied plant-pollinator interactions in the last decades, originating thousands of plant-pollinator interaction networks worldwide. Several initiatives have tried to integrate plant-pollinator interaction data into databases such as *Mangal* (Poisot et al. 2016) or *GloBI* (Poelen, Simons, and Mungall 2014), resulting in numerous large scale comparative analyses that have enhanced our understanding of the ecology of plants and pollinators (e.g., European wild bee data trends; Marshall et al. 2024). Despite all these resources, Europe lacks accessible harmonized plant-pollinator interaction data that allow researchers to evaluate plant-pollinator interactions at a European level, which will guide research efforts, conservation planning and will set a foundation for future global change research. For example, only over a dozen of European plant-pollinator networks are included in *Mangal*, while *GloBI* focuses on pairwise interactions disconnected from the community context. Assembling and curating the existing information on EU plant-pollinator networks will guide research efforts, conservation planning and will set a foundation for future global change research.

The interactions between different plant and pollinator species within a community form complex networks. Macro-ecological analyses of the topology of these networks have revealed common properties across them, such as truncated power-law degree distributions (Jordano 1987) or nestedness (Bascompte et al. 2003). In addition, this type of large scale analyses can help understanding landscape level processes that cannot be explored at the community level, such as ecological patterns across geographic regions (Olesen and Jordano 2002; Traveset et

al. 2016) or environmental gradients (Ramos-Jiliberto et al. 2010; Rech et al. 2016; Saunders et al. 2023). Although macro-ecological approaches make significant contributions to knowledge, they tend to be rare, and are strongly influenced by the spatio-temporal availability and nature of the data (Burkle and Alarcón 2011; Trøjelsgaard and Olesen 2013). For instance, plant-pollinator studies tend to differ in sampling effort and methodology which can impact the structure of the resulting plant-pollinator networks (Gibson et al. 2011; Jordano 2016). Further, despite little sampling effort could capture most of the relevant functional species (Hegland et al. 2010), most plant-pollinator networks have unobserved interactions because undersampling (Olesen et al. 2011; Chacoff et al. 2012). Thus, the lack of strong spatio-temporal coverage, along with the current intrinsic limitations of sampling plant-pollinator networks, highlight the need to keep gathering and integrating informative species interaction data to properly unravel the different ecological processes that shape plant-pollinator interactions at large scales.

Here, we present the European Plant-Pollinator Networks database (EuPPollNet), which contains harmonized information on interaction data of plants and pollinators at European level. The pollinator taxonomic groups are composed by the main orders of entomofauna that visit and pollinate flowering plants in Europe. These include insect species from the orders Hymenoptera, Diptera, Lepidoptera, and Coleoptera (Willemstein 1987; Potts et al. 2015), which comprise almost the totality of recorded interactions in EuPPollNet (99.88%). To understand the scope of the database, we examine the taxonomic and sampling coverage of the different plant and pollinator species at European level with the help of the most up-to-date species checklists and rarefaction analyses. In addition, we investigate how two key structural metrics of plant-pollinator networks, connectance and nestedness, change across the latitudes range of studies and bioclimatic regions. Finally, we also examine whether plant-pollinator networks fulfill the expectation of being more nested than null expectations. EuPPollNet aims to cover a wide range of taxonomic groups and habitats, while also providing other variables of interest that define the ecological context and sampling methods of the study. In addition, EuPPollNet offers a transparent and accessible workflow of its data management and species harmonization that allows the database to be reused and to expand over time. This database provides a large number of community-level networks with curated and harmonized data, distinguishing it from other currently available resources that contain plant-pollinator interactions. We expect that EuPPollNet can be used to evaluate macro-ecological processes in plant-pollinator networks, guide conservation planning, and set a baseline for global change research.

## 2 | METHODS

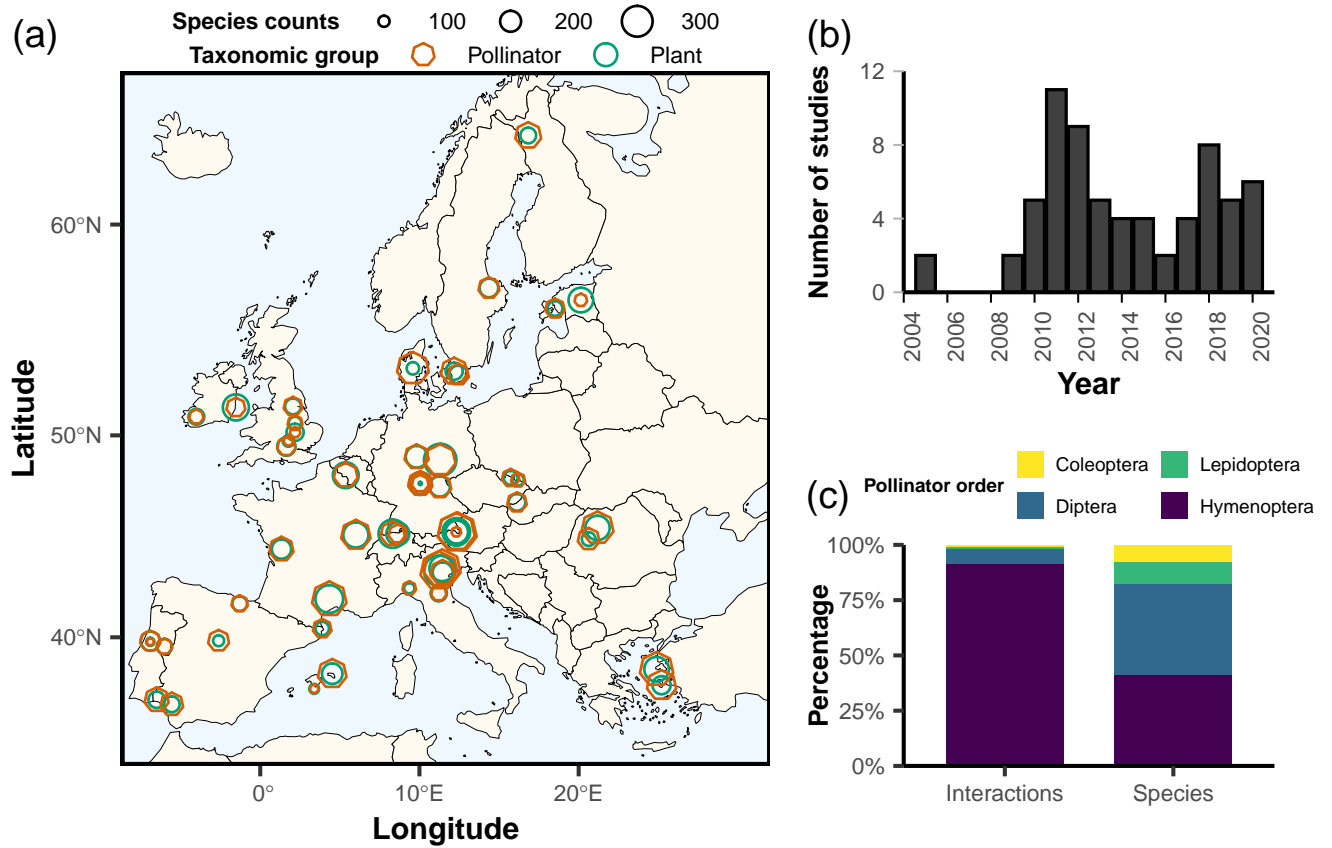
### Data acquisition

The EuPPollNet database includes published and unpublished studies compiled initially by a wide number of researchers and institutions within the European continent. As this database is the result of one of the working packages of the European project Safeguard, first, data

was directly asked to members of the Safeguard project. Second, the request was extended to data owners outside of the project. These other data owners were identified by direct communication with colleagues suggested by Safeguard members and by directly searching studies on Google Scholar of under-represented regions within the database. To keep high quality standards that will allow robust future ecological research, we only included studies meeting the following criteria: 1) studies that contained time- and geo-referenced records of plant-pollinator interactions; and 2) studies with phyto-centric plant-pollinator networks with quantitative visitation data.

## Dataset description

The database contains 51 independent published and unpublished studies conducted during the time period 2004 - 2021 in 17 different countries (**Figure 1a** and **Figure 1b**). The studies differ in sampling effort and methodology, and thus documenting sampling methods and sampling effort is an important feature of EuPPollNet. Most studies took place within a single flowering season (68.63%), sampled a given location an average of 7.22 days, and documented interactions mostly by using transects as the sampling method (62.75%). The database includes a total of 1,144,371 distinct interactions, considering interaction as the contact of a pollinator individual to the reproductive structure of a particular plant. Most of the pollinator species in the database belong to the orders Hymenoptera and Diptera, each comprising approximately 1,000 species in the database. However, the majority of plant-pollinator interactions are from Hymenoptera species (91.04%; **Figure 1c**). Notably, *Apis mellifera* represents 70.68% of the total interaction records from the database and an average of 31.00% of the total interactions per network.



**Figure 1.** (a) Locations of the studies in EuPPollNet showing the total number of pollinator (i.e., orange heptagon) and plant (i.e., green circles) species per study. The sizes of these shapes are proportional to the respective species counts. For visualization purposes, we have focused only on the European region with studies and selected a single location per study. (b) Number of studies by year in EuPPollNet. (c) Number of species and interactions across the four main pollinator orders in EuPPollNet.

## Data structure

The EuPPollNet database is available in both .csv and .rds formats. The .csv file contains data in long format, while the .rds file stores the data in a list structure, with networks organized within each study. The file contains a total of 30 columns that depict where and when the plant-pollinator interaction was observed (**Table 1**). To provide a standard unit of plant-pollinator interaction across studies, each row depicts a single interaction between a plant and a pollinator species. To build a plant-pollinator network matrix at a site level, users only need to group interactions by plant and pollinator species, site and study. Information about habitat type and bioclimatic region are also provided in this file. In addition, the interaction dataset includes a column that describes the presence or absence of floral counts for each study. The flower count data is provided in a separate file. Two thirds of studies contain information on floral abundance, but the methods and units differ greatly across studies. Finally, metadata at the study level is provided, including information about the authors, digital object identifier if available, sampling time and taxonomic coverage of the main pollinator groups for each study.

## Taxonomic harmonization

All plant and pollinator species names were checked and harmonized in R using **rgbif** ([Chamberlain, Oldoni, and Waller 2022](#)). The protocol for plants and pollinators is similar but slightly different given the availability of the different taxonomic resources. For transparency, we have included in the database the original species name, the new assigned name, and, if the name of the species is uncertain (e.g., species complex or species alike). In addition, taxonomic information at family, order and phylum level was downloaded for each species.

For plants: (i) we initially verified the exact matches against the GBIF species checklist; (ii) we selected unmatched cases and fixed orthographic errors; (iii) we retrieved again taxonomic information for those unmatched cases, evaluated accuracy of fuzzing matching and programmatically fixed records that are still not found; (iv) finally, we used the World Flora Taxonomic Backbone ([Govaerts et al. 2021](#); WFO, July 7, 2022) as the ultimate filter for taxonomic information as we used it to calculate the plant taxonomic coverage of our database.

For pollinators: (i) we first created a checklist of species names for the most representative pollinator groups at the European level by combining the most up to date published checklists of bees and syrphids ([Reverté et al. 2023](#)) with the one of butterflies ([Wiemers et al. 2018](#)); (ii) we compared pollinator species names against the checklist and recovered some unmatched cases with restrictive fuzzy matching by using **stringdist** package ([Van der Loo et al. 2014](#)); (iii) we fixed unmatched records when necessary and retrieved the taxonomic information for all species from GBIF; (iv) we fixed the non-found cases in the GBIF checklist and made sure that all species names from bees, syrphids and butterflies were named according to their respective species checklists.



**Table 1.** Column names and their descriptions within the EuPPollNet database.

Variable	Description
Study_id	Identifier of the study
Network_id	Identifier of a site sampled within a study
Sampling_method	Type of plant-pollinator sampling
Authors_habitat	Type of habitat as described by the authors
EuPPollNet_habitat	Type of habitat homogenized across studies
Bioregion	European biogeographical regions
Country	Country where the plant-pollinator interaction was observed
Locality	Locality where the plant-pollinator interaction was observed
Latitude-Longitude	Coordinates of the observed interaction in decimal degrees
Date	Year, month and day when the observation took place
Interaction	Number of interactions. By default is 1 as interactions are provided ungrouped
Plant_original_name	Plant species name given by the authors
Plant_accepted_name	Harmonized plant species name in the database
Plant_rank	Taxonomic rank of the observation
Plant_order	Order taxonomic rank of the observed plant species
Plant_family	Family taxonomic rank of the observed plant species
Plant_genus	Genus taxonomic rank of the observed plant species
Plant_unsure_id	Category to indicate if the plant species name is unsure (Yes) or not (No)
Plant_uncertainty_type	If the name is unsure, type of species uncertainty is provided
Pollinator_original_name	Pollinator species name given by the authors
Pollinator_accepted_name	Harmonized pollinator species name in the database
Pollinator_rank	Taxonomic rank of the observation
Pollinator_order	Order taxonomic rank of the observed pollinator species
Pollinator_family	Family taxonomic rank of the observed pollinator species
Pollinator_genus	Genus taxonomic rank of the observed pollinator species
Pollinator_unsure_id	Category to indicate if the pollinator species name is unsure (Yes) or not (No)
Pollinator_uncertainty_type	If the name is unsure, type of species uncertainty is provided
Flower_data	Floral data availability (Yes) or (No)
Flower_data_merger	Column to merge floral data with the interaction dataset

## Taxonomic coverage

To assess the completeness of plant and pollinator species in the EuPPollNet database at European level, we used the aforementioned checklists for plants and pollinators. Specifically for plants, we refined the checklist to include only European flowering plants and excluded taxonomic groups not associated with biotic pollination. We did this by first excluding the families considered to have exclusively a wind pollination mode (see [Culley, Weller, and Sakai 2002](#)), and then by filtering out the genera with wind or non-biotic pollination from families that exhibit both biotic and non-biotic pollination modes. Additionally, we manually included some exotic species and added unresolved species names that were not present in the accepted names of the checklist at the current version of usage. For pollinators, we compared only the taxonomic coverage of bees, syrphids and butterflies by using their species checklists at European level. The potential number of pollinator species at European level was estimated by adding the total number of species of bees, syrphids, and flies from the checklists, along with the extrapolated number of species from other insect pollinators. This extrapolated number was estimated by assuming that the sampling coverage of these other insect pollinators is equal to the average coverage across bees, syrphids, and butterflies (mean coverage = 31.03; sd = 4.19).

Finally, to evaluate if the presence-absence of interaction records for bees and flowering plants follows a phylogenetic pattern within the database, we calculated its phylogenetic signal at genus and family level, respectively. The phylogenetic signal was calculated by using the *phylosig* function from the **phytools** package ([Revell 2012](#)). We extracted the phylogenetic information for bees from a genus level phylogeny ([Hedtke, Patiny, and Danforth 2013](#)) and processed it with the help of the packages **ape** ([Paradis et al. 2019](#)), **MCMCgldmm** ([Hadfield 2010](#)) and **phytools**; and for plants the phylogenetic tree was obtained from a species level plant phylogeny ([Smith and Brown 2018](#)) with the help of **rtree** package ([Li 2023](#)).

## Sampling coverage

The completeness of the EuPPollNet database was evaluated by exploring the rarefied accumulation curves of plant and pollinator species and their interactions across the different sampling sites. In addition, an outstanding question in ecology is how many pollinators are required to pollinate flowering plants (e.g., [Kleijn et al. 2015](#) for crops). To that end, we also calculated the accumulation curve of pollinator species with an increasing number of plant species. The rarefied and extrapolated sampling curves were obtained using the **iNEXT** package ([Hsieh and Chao 2016](#)). This was complemented with 100 random accumulation curves obtained programmatically to guide the visualization of the different rarefied curves.

## Habitat type and bioclimatic region

The different sites per study were described with a habitat type by the authors. As these habitats are not standardized across studies, they were standardized with the additional help of land cover information and visual checks on current satellite imagery. For each georeferenced site, the land cover information was extracted from Corine Land Cover (CLC, version 2018) with the help of the `Terra` package (Hijmans et al. 2022). Based on the habitat classification from the authors and the CLC classification, we created habitat categories that intend to summarize the diversity of habitats in the EuPPollNet database (see habitat type definition in supplementary material). These categories allow a quick comparison and understanding of the habitat types from the database. Moreover, Europe is characterized by a great variety of environmental conditions that harbor different biota. Thus, to allow authors to explore the set of studies that share similar environmental conditions and species, we assigned to each site a biogeographical region. The biogeographical regions were downloaded from the European Environment Agency (version 2016) and were matched to the different sites using a spatial join from the `sf` package (Pebesma et al. 2018).

## Network analyses

To provide a general overview of the main aspects of this set of plant-pollinator networks, we evaluated network patterns of connectance and nestedness across the latitudinal range of studies and bioclimatic regions. We selected these two network metrics as they are commonly evaluated in plant-pollinator network studies and capture structural properties with a straightforward interpretation. However, these network metrics are not independent of sampling effort (e.g., number of species) and to allow comparisons across them, we implemented “standardised” versions of connectance and nestedness. As connectance is negatively associated with network size (Jordano 1987), we evaluated how network connectance was associated with the number of species (i.e., log of geometric mean of plants and pollinators) and extracted the residuals from this association (i.e., residual connectance) as a measurement of corrected connectance. This was done with the help of a Beta regression implemented with the package `betareg` (Cribari-Neto and Zeileis 2010). Second, we implemented a metric of nestedness (i.e., NODFc) that allows the comparison across networks as it corrects by connectance and the number of species (Song, Rohr, and Saavedra 2017). This metric was calculated with the help of the `maxnodf` package (Hoeppeke and Simmons 2021), which employs a computational efficient approach to calculate it. Both residual connectance and NODFc were used as dependent variables to evaluate their association with latitude. In addition, we explored the association between connectance and nestedness with the number of species per network by conducting Kendall rank correlation coefficient in order to be able to compare the strength of this association across both network metrics.

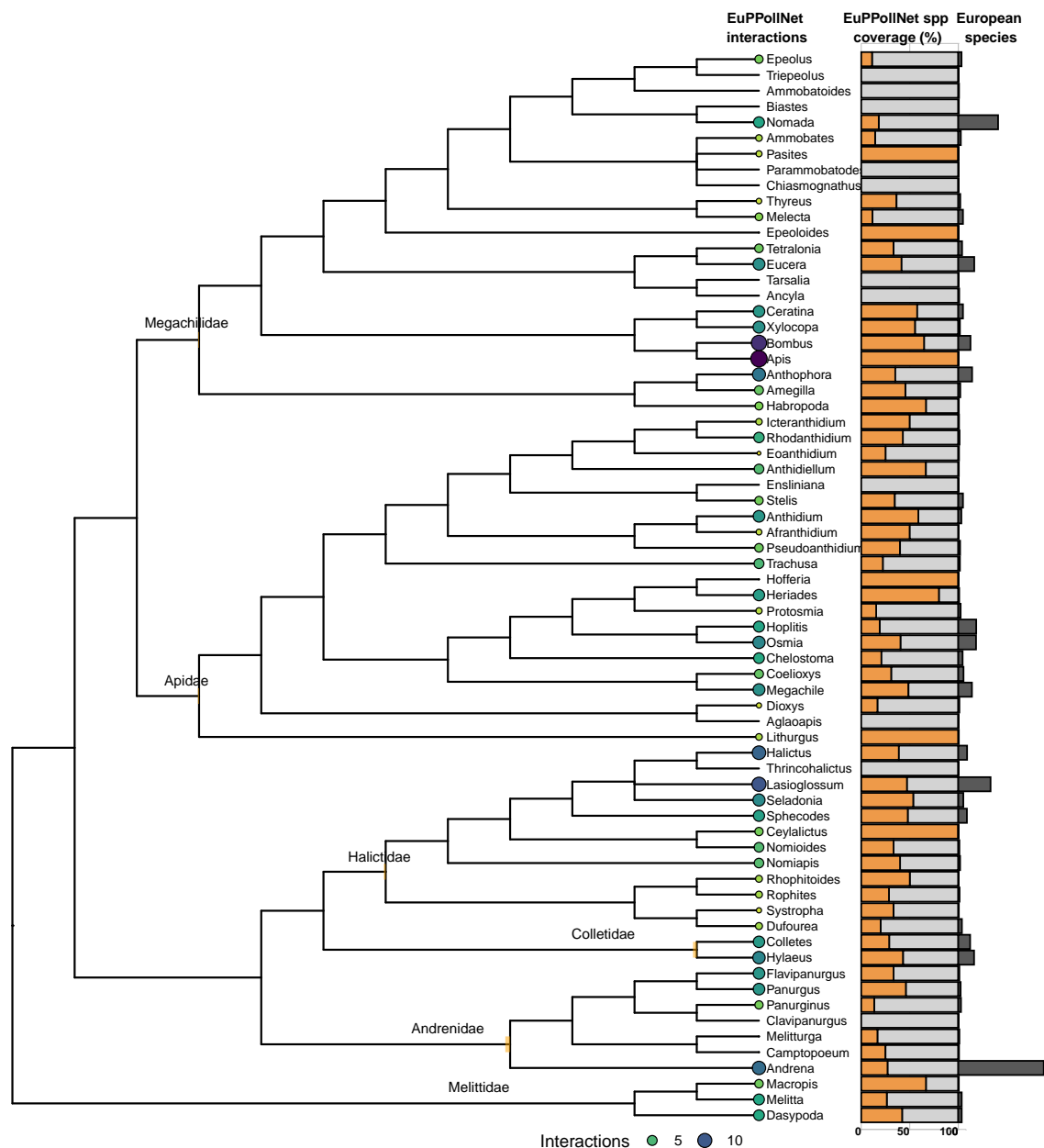
Finally, to compare if networks are more or less nested than expected by chance, we employed the traditional z-score approach with the widely used nestedness metric (NODF) from

Almeida-Neto et al. (2008), as this approach allow us to compare our results with previous published nestedness analysis in plant-pollinator networks and only compares each unique network against their randomized versions. We calculated 100 null models for each network with the help of the *vaznull* function from the package **bipartite** (Dormann, Gruber, and Fründ 2008) that implements the null model from Vázquez et al. (2005). These null networks have the same connectance and number of plant and pollinator species as the empirical ones, but different marginal totals. Both connectance and nestedness (NODF) were estimated for each network by using the function *networklevel* from **bipartite**.

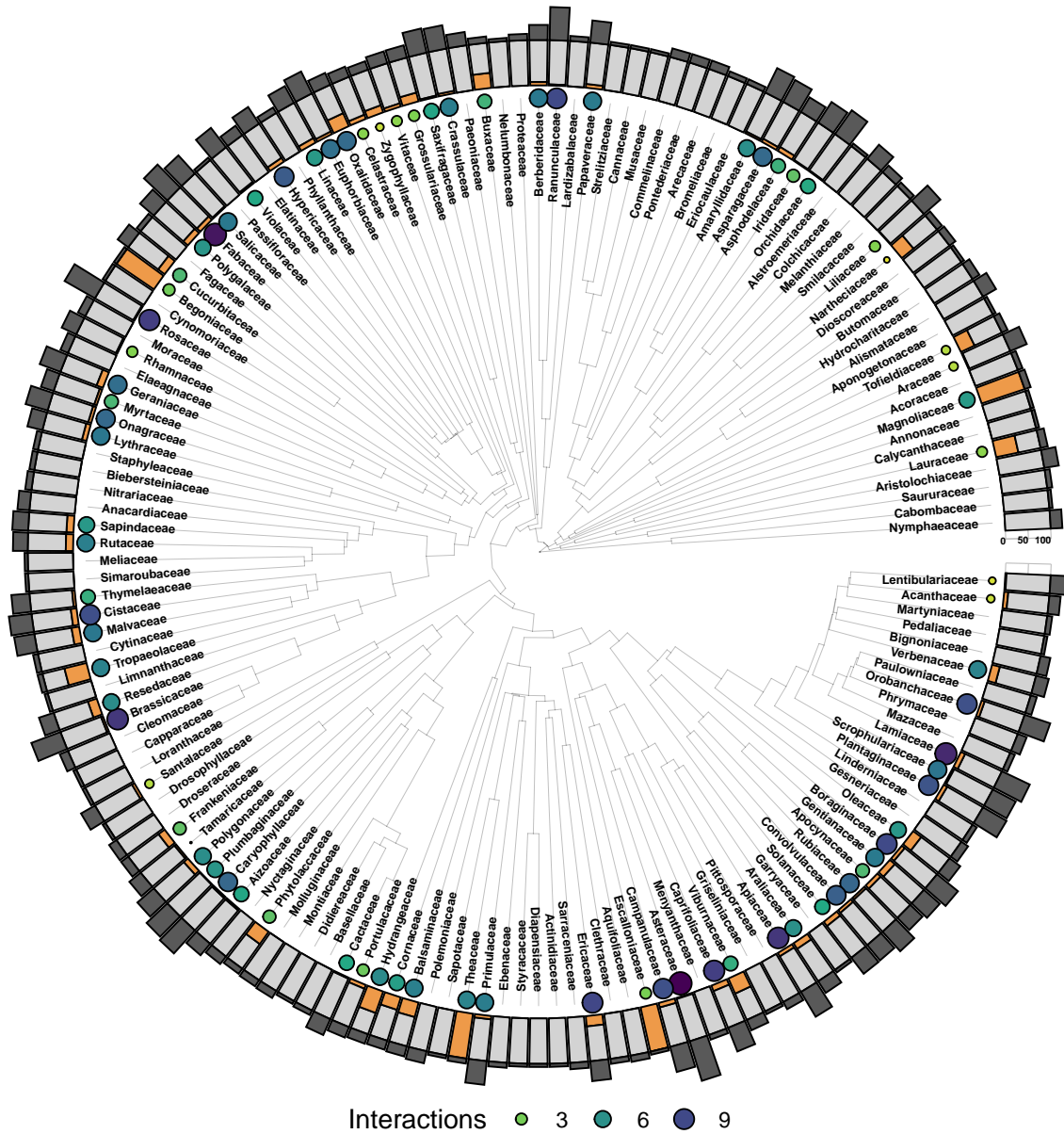
## 3 | RESULTS

### Taxonomic coverage

The database contains a total of 2,065 pollinators and 1,355 plant species. The coverage of the main pollinators groups occurring in Europe is 33.82% for bees, 33.08% for syrphids and 26.21% for butterflies (see **Figure S1** for coverage at the family level for bees and butterflies, and at the subfamily level for syrphids). Bees constitute 90.58% of the interactions of the database, and 78.03% of the interactions when excluding honey bees. Within the database, 83.82% of bee genera have at least one species with interaction records, and the average coverage at the bee genus level is 36.99% (**Figure 2**). In addition, the presence or absence of interactions records for bees seems not to follow any sort of phylogenetic pattern ( $\lambda = 0.07$ ;  $P = 0.65$ ). The database coverage of all flowering plant species occurring in Europe is 5.34% (**Figure 3**), with an average coverage of 9.04% at the plant family level. Approximately, half of the plant families have at least one species with interaction records (52.56%), and the presence or absence of interaction data for the different plant species also seems not to follow a statistically relevant phylogenetic pattern ( $\lambda = 0.26$ ;  $P = 0.07$ ).



**Figure 2.** Phylogenetic representation of bee genera in the EuPPollNet database within the context of all European bee genera. The number of interactions recorded per genus in the database is illustrated using circles, with their sizes proportional to the number of interactions on a logarithmic scale. Additionally, a gradient of colors ranging from yellow to dark purple aids in this visualization. The coverage of species recorded in EuPPollNet per genus at the European level is depicted with orange and light grey bars, representing the percentage of species included and not included in the database, respectively, out of the total number of bee species per genus at the European level. Grey bars indicate the total number of species per genus at the European level.

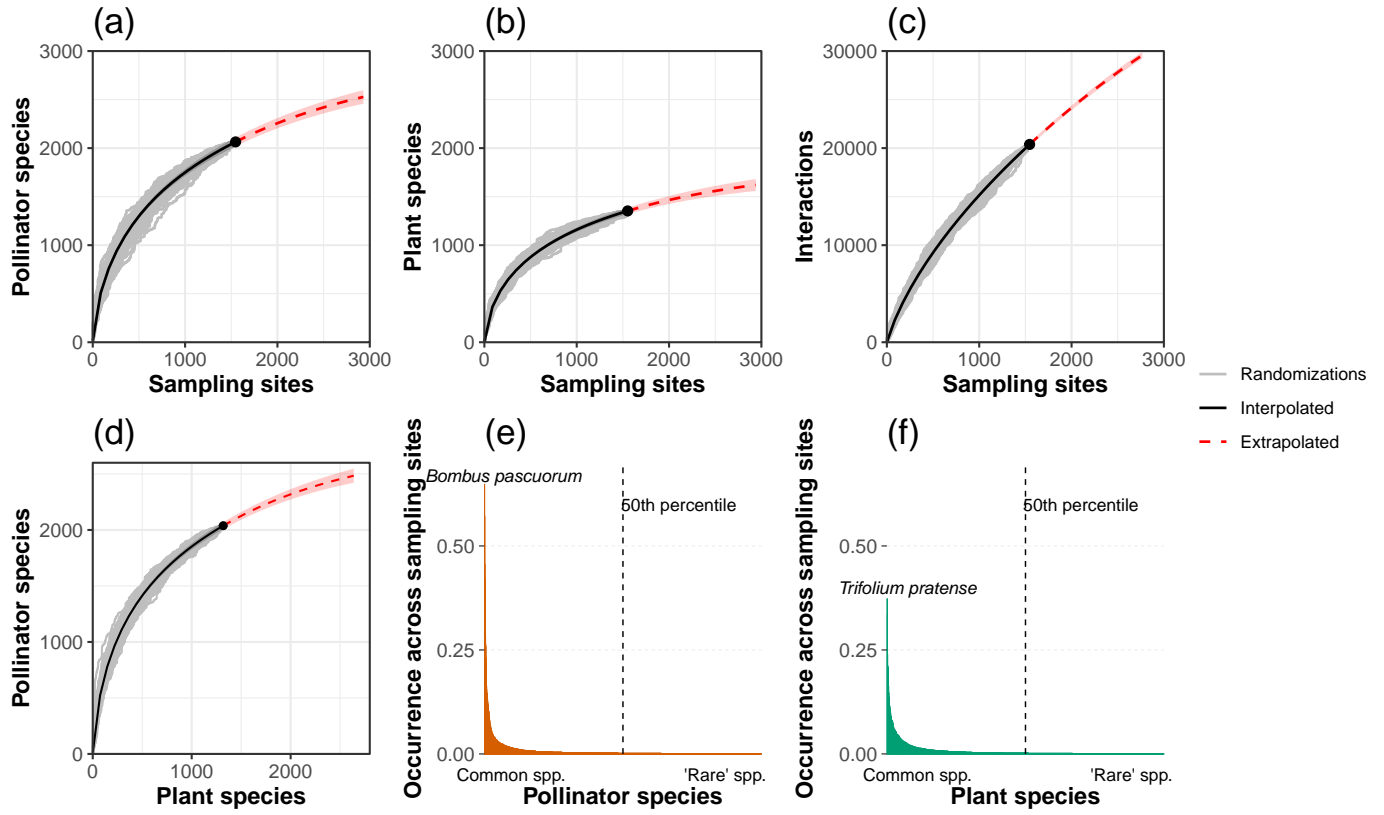


**Figure 3.** Phylogenetic representation of the plant families in the EuPPollNet database within the context of all flowering plant families occurring in Europe. The number of interactions recorded per genus in the database is illustrated using circles, with their sizes proportional to the number of interactions on a logarithmic scale. Additionally, a gradient of colors ranging from yellow to dark purple aids in this visualization. The coverage of species recorded in EuPPollNet per genus at the European level is depicted with orange and light grey bars, representing the percentage of species included and not included in the database, respectively, out of the total number of flowering plant species per family at the European level. Grey bars indicate the total number of species per family at the European level on logarithmic scale.

## Sampling coverage

The estimated sampling coverage of plant and pollinator species within the database across the different sampling sites is approximately 97% for both taxonomic groups. This suggests that the rarefied accumulation curves of both plant and pollinator species exhibit already a “quasi-asymptotic” growth of species richness by considering the current number of sampling sites or networks (**Figure 4a-4b**). The predicted observed species richness by doubling the sampling effort on the already sampled habitat types within the database will only increase pollinator richness by 24.13% and plant richness by 21.14%. However, the sampling coverage of interactions is 74.17%, and by doubling the sampling effort the predicted number of unique interactions recorded will have approximately a twofold increase (54.83%; **Figure 4c**). Similarly, to the plant and pollinator species accumulation curves across sampling sites, when we consider the accumulated pollinator richness across sampled plant species, this curve also shows a “quasi-asymptotic” growth with a sampling coverage value of 96.66%. The predicted recorded pollinator species by doubling the number of plants sampled is expected to increase by 21.90% (**Figure 4d**). In addition, when we explore how common are plant and pollinator species across all sampling sites, we find that the majority of plant and pollinator species tend to be regionally specific, and only a minor portion of them is being shared across a broad range of sampling sites (**Figures 4e-4f**). For instance, most plants (84.72%) and pollinators (87.07%) are exclusively found in less than 1% of sampling sites; and the most common plant (*Trifolium pratense*) and pollinator (*Bombus pascuorum*) species are only found in 37.32% and 64.80% of sampling sites, respectively.

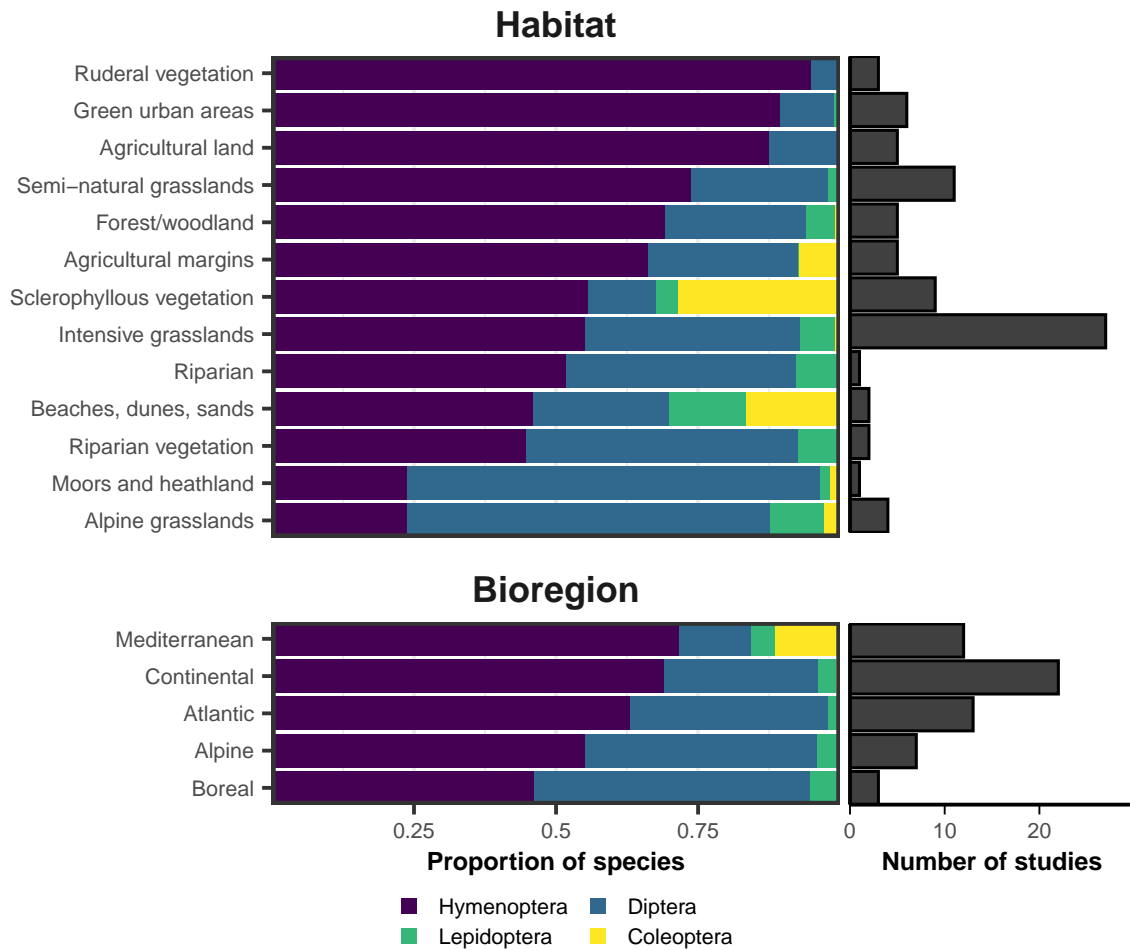




**Figure 4.** Graphs (a-b-c) indicate the accumulation curves for pollinators, plants, and their interactions across sampling sites. Grey solid lines represent 100 randomized accumulation curves, the black solid lines represent the interpolated curve (i.e., the mean across curves), and the red dashed lines illustrate the extrapolated curve for approximately 3000 sampling sites. The solid black points indicate the number of species and interactions contained in the database. Graph (d) shows the accumulation curve of pollinator species across an increasing number of plant species. This last graph uses the same color and shape structure as the ones in the top panel. Graphs (e-f) indicate the percentage of occurrence (i.e., incidence) of plant and pollinator species across sampling sites. Species on the left (i.e., common) are found in many sampling sites, while species on the right (i.e., rare) are found in few or only a single sampling site. Note that indeed *Apis mellifera* is the most common pollinator but was excluded from this visualization.

## Habitat type and bioclimatic region

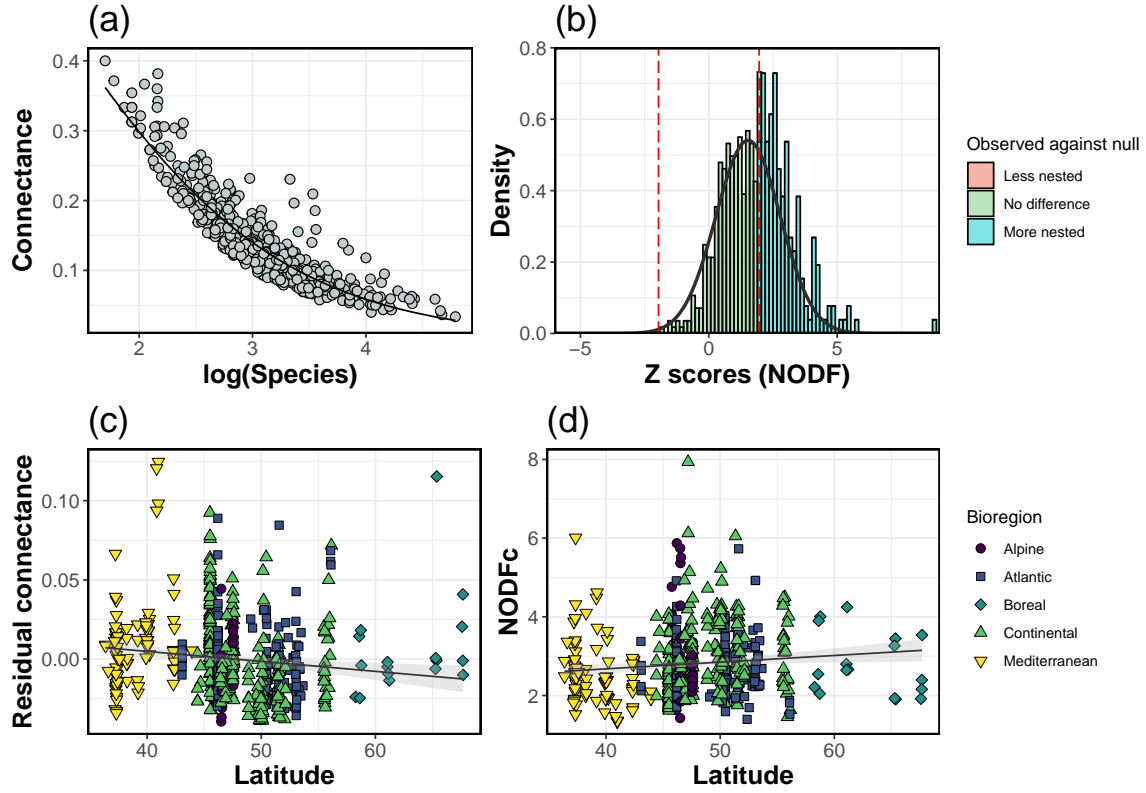
The proportion of the major pollinator orders within the database differed across habitats and bioclimatic regions (**Figure 5**). As expected, Hymenoptera was the main taxonomic order on the majority of habitats, exceeded only by Diptera on the habitat categories of riparian vegetation, moors and heathland, and alpine grasslands. Overall, the proportion of Lepidoptera and Coleoptera was low across all habitats but Coleoptera showed a notably increase in sclerophyllous vegetation and beaches, dunes and sands habitat categories. Similar patterns were observed when exploring the pollinator proportions by bioclimatic region. In this particular case, Hymenoptera was the predominant order in all bioclimatic regions with Diptera taking more importance in Alpine and Atlantic regions. Again, Lepidoptera shows low proportions across all bioclimatic regions and Coleoptera seems to be only relevant in Mediterranean regions at European level. Notably, the number of studies (**Figure 5**) and sampling sites (**Figure S2**) also differs across habitats and bioclimatic regions. The habitats sampled by a higher number of studies in the database are intensive grasslands (27), semi-natural grasslands (11) and sclerophyllous vegetation (9). However, the habitats that contain a higher number of sampling sites are intensive grasslands (589), agricultural margins (432) and agricultural land (141). The bioclimatic regions with a higher number of studies are continental (22), atlantic (13) and mediterranean (12); and the ones that contain a higher number of sampling sites are atlantic (459), continental (454) and boreal (439).



**Figure 5.** Proportion of the major pollinator orders by habitat types and bioclimatic regions in the EuPPollNet database. The orders, from left to right, include Hymenoptera, Diptera, Lepidoptera and Coleoptera. The horizontal barplot on the right indicates the number of studies that were conducted on each habitat type or bioclimatic region. Note that a single study can contribute to more than one habitat or bioclimatic region. Areas with a greater number of studies are more likely to depict accurate proportions of the different pollinator orders in those systems.

## Network properties

Connectance values ranged between 0.03 to 0.4 ( $\bar{x} = 0.14$ ) and as expected, followed an negative exponential relationship with the number of species per network (Kendall  $\tau = -0.75$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ; **Figure 6a**). Nestedness values (NODFc) ranged between 1.34 to 7.94 ( $\bar{x} = 2.81$ ), and as expected for this metric, were independent of the mean number of species (Kendall  $\tau = -0.06$ ,  $P = 0.03$ ; **Figure S3**). We found that only 31.62% of networks were statistically more nested than expected by chance, with 68.38% showing no statistical difference, and none being less nested than null expectations (**Figure 6b**). Latitude explained little of the observed variability of residual connectance and nestedness across networks (connectance:  $R^2 = 0.02$ ,  $P = 0$ , **Figure 6a**; NODFc:  $R^2 = 0.01$ ,  $P = 0.02$ , **Figure 6b**). Overall, networks towards higher latitudes showed lower residual connectance and higher nestedness than networks located in lower latitudes. Note that residual connectance and normalised nestedness showed a moderate negative correlation (Kendall  $\tau = -0.46$ ,  $P = 0$ ).



**Figure 6.** Graph (a) shows the association between network connectance and the geometric mean of plant and pollinator species per network on a log-scale with the respective fitted line from a Beta regression. Graph (b) shows the distribution of z-scores when comparing the nestedness from the empirical networks with their randomised counterparts (100 null models for each network). The vertical red dashed lines represent the z critical value for a two tailed test with  $\alpha = 0.05$ . Z-scores to the left of the first vertical red dashed line indicate that networks are less nested than expected by chance (red), those between the two dashed lines indicate no statistical difference from random expectations (green), and those to the right indicate that networks are more nested than expected by chance (blue). Graphs (c-d) show the fitted regression of residual connectance and nestedness across the latitudinal range of the studies from the database. In addition, the bioclimatic region of each network is indicated with points of different shapes and colours.

### 3 | DISCUSSION

EuPollNet offers the largest set of plant-pollinator networks and plant-pollinator studies compiled to date at European level. The database contains 1,355 plant and 2,065 pollinator species with over a million interaction records. While the overall sampling coverage of species and interactions is relatively high across the sampled sites, the taxonomic coverage of plants and the main pollinator groups at the European level is still relatively low (i.e., 97.4% for flowering plants and 33.8% for bee species). This likely reflects the fact that most plant and pollinator species are rare, and geographically restricted. For example given that most of the plant-pollinator networks from the database are sampled on intensive grasslands, and habitat heterogeneity is a crucial factor in understanding pollinator diversity at European level (Kleijn et al. 2015; Hass et al. 2018; Martínez-Núñez et al. 2022), adding studies on other habitat types is likely to result in a rapid increase of the coverage of plant and pollinator species and their interactions. Indeed, plant and pollinator species were rarely shared across multiple sites, indicating that there are few “common” species and many “rare” ones at the metaweb or continental level. This high number of “rare” species results in an upward slope of the species or interaction accumulation curves (Thompson and Withers 2003). In other words, minimal sampling efforts are capturing a substantial number of species and interactions, but achieving a comprehensive inventory will require numerous sampling events within and across habitats, particularly for plant-pollinator interactions.

Bees are responsible for the majority of the interactions at the metaweb level, but their relative relevance changed across habitats and bioclimatic regions. For instance, plant-pollinator communities in the Mediterranean were dominated by bees, while communities in Alpine or Boreal regions were fly species rich or fly-dominated. These patterns are consistent with our current understanding of bee diversity, which peaks in dry or temperate areas (Orr et al. 2021; Leclercq et al. 2023); and with the fact that colder environments (i.e., altitude and latitude wise) harbor a larger fraction of fly pollinators compared to other taxa (Elberling and Olesen 1999; Lefebvre et al. 2018). In addition, beetles were only common in the Mediterranean region. Although the networks from the database are visitation networks and do not capture pollinator efficiency (Ballantyne, Baldock, and Willmer 2015), the high proportion of beetles as floral visitors in the Mediterranean provides further support for their potential role as pollinators in this region (Herrera 2019; León-Osper and Narbona 2022). The number of butterfly species and interactions were relatively low compared to the other taxa. While Europe contains fewer butterfly species than other regions of the world (Ollerton 2017), their relevance as pollinators is likely underestimated within this database. This is because a large fraction of studies (~40%) did not sample butterflies, and conventional sampling methods for monitoring other insect pollinators (e.g., bees or flies) may be inadequate for sampling plant-butterfly interactions (Isaac et al. 2011). On the contrary, honey bees were present in 86.3% of networks and conducted on average a third of the total interactions per network. Indeed, this proportion is higher than the one found when considering only natural communities at a global scale (~13%; Hung et al. 2018), which highlights their key role as potential pollinators of many flowering plants. However, the rise of beekeeping in Europe has led to high honey bee densities,

which can negatively impact wild pollinators and the plants they visit (Steffan-Dewenter and Tscharntke 2000; Magrach et al. 2017; Herrera 2020), emphasising the need to evaluate these impacts and implement actions if necessary.

Although Europe contains a much larger number of flowering plants than pollinator species (~4 to 1 ratio), the observed number of pollinator species almost doubled the one of plants in the database. This could be explained by the fact that all networks are phytocentric, resulting in sampling bias towards pollinator species (Jordano 2016; Vizentin-Bugoni et al. 2018). While animal-centred sampling is likely to increase the plant:pollinator species ratio (e.g., Encinas-Viso et al. 2023), the spatial scale and environmental context of the sampled communities will also influence their observed diversity, especially given the ability to move of pollinators and the sessile nature of plants. As expected (Jordano 1987), we found that network connectance decreased exponentially with the number of species. Overall, latitude did not explain major changes in residual connectance or normalised nestedness across networks. However, consistent with Olesen and Jordano (2002), residual connectance -the deviation from the expected connectance for a given network size- was lower at higher latitudes, while normalised nestedness, which is negatively correlated with residual connectance, increased towards higher latitudes. Thus, giving their association and that both metrics capture structural properties of species interactions, the potential ecological explanations that can help understanding their latitudinal trends can be similar. For instance, networks at lower latitudes in Europe are exposed to higher temperatures and are bee-dominated, which can result in higher visitation rates (Arroyo, Armesto, and Primack 1985; Classen et al. 2015; Herrera 2019), and the overall level of pollinator generalization seems to be higher at lower latitudes (Schleuning et al. 2012). Therefore, we hypothesise that these different factors can increase the possible number of connections that can be established between plants and pollinators for a given network size, resulting in more connected networks but less nested ones, as these networks are likely to deviate more from a perfect nested or hierarchical structure compared to networks at higher latitudes. Finally, while one third of networks were more nested than expected by chance, two thirds did not show statistical difference with null expectations. Therefore, while this supports the idea that plant-pollinator networks tend to be nested (Bascompte et al. 2003), this result suggests that nestedness could be a less prevalent feature than previously thought for plant-pollinator networks.

Despite this database covering a wide range of habitats across 17 countries, it contains geographical biases that can impact our understanding of plant-pollinator communities (Hughes et al. 2021). For instance, most plant-pollinator networks belong to central Europe, while Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean region are under-represented. This is consistent with previous studies which also report lack of plant-pollinator data for those regions (Bennett et al. 2018; Marshall et al. 2024), highlighting that this database shows existing patterns in data availability despite the absence of a systematic search for studies. This is especially relevant as Eastern Europe is expected to continue developing and use their vast natural resources (Sutcliffe et al. 2015), and the Mediterranean region is likely to be severely impacted by climate change (Jaworski et al. 2022; Duchenne et al. 2020; Pareja-Bonilla et al. 2023). These areas are well known for their rich pollinator diversity (Miličić, Vujić, and Cardoso 2018; Reverté et

al. 2023), and their under-representation is likely contributing to the low taxonomic coverage of this database at the European level. Although some of the most well studied countries in Europe (e.g., Belgium or The Netherlands) seem to have suffered most of the plant and pollinator biodiversity loss at the end of the 20th century (Carvalho et al. 2013), plant-pollinator communities in Europe and across the globe still suffer from major threads such as climate change (Bartomeus et al. 2011; Duchenne et al. 2020), land use change (Reidsma et al. 2006; Batáry et al. 2015), or the introduction of alien species (Vila et al. 2009; Vanbergen, Espíndola, and Aizen 2018). Therefore, continuous monitoring programs are needed in order to evaluate spatio-temporal changes of species and their interactions across different European habitats and regions. This will allow local and large scale analyses of the status and trends of plant-pollinator communities, effectively informing management and conservation actions.

In conclusion, the EuPPollNet database enables researchers to explore spatial, taxonomic and structural properties of plant-pollinator networks within Europe. Importantly, the networks of the database differ in sampling effort and methodology, which can largely impact the resulting structure of interactions (Rivera-Hutinel et al. 2012; Chacoff et al. 2012). In contrast to previous databases, EuPPollNet provides interaction data along with sampling information that could help researchers to better control and select the most suitable networks for their research questions. Here, we have shown how connectance and nestedness change across their latitudinal range and that nestedness is not a ubiquitous feature of all plant-pollinator networks. Although further evaluations of these findings are needed, this illustrates the numerous questions that can be answered with this set of networks. The reproducible workflow allows researchers to adapt and reuse this database, enabling the continuous addition of new networks to better evaluate the status and spatio-temporal trends of plant-pollinator communities. Finally, we hope this database becomes an iterative resource that keeps growing and improving over time to better understand and conserve European biodiversity.



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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

## DATA AVAILABILITY

All data and code to produce of this database and manuscript are available at Zenodo ([LINK](#)) and Github ([LINK](#)).

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

**Title:** EuPPollNet: A European database of plant-pollinator networks

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**Contains:**

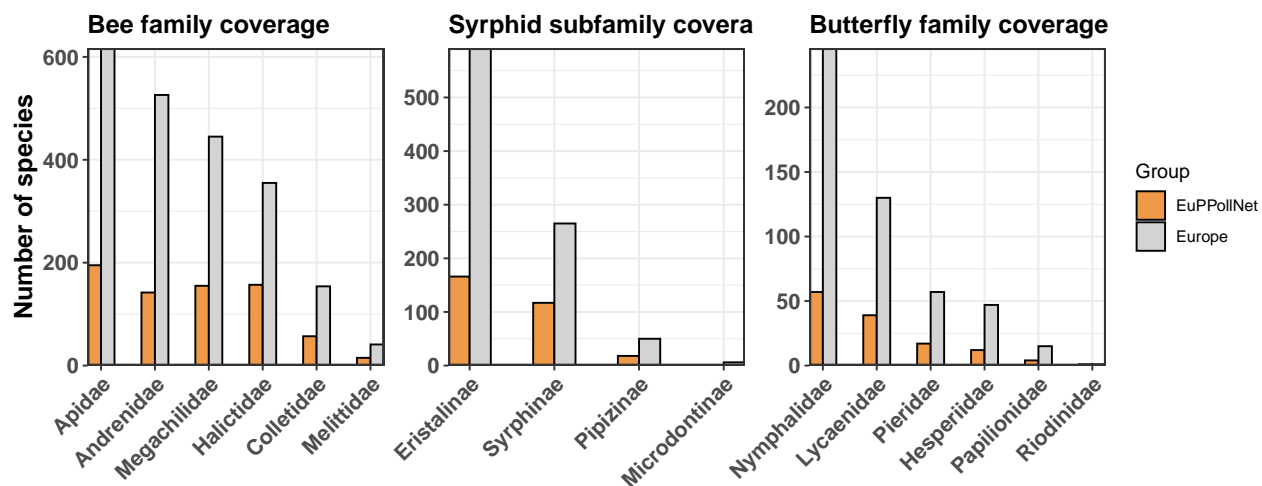
- Supplementary text 1
- Figure S1
- Figure S2
- Figure S3



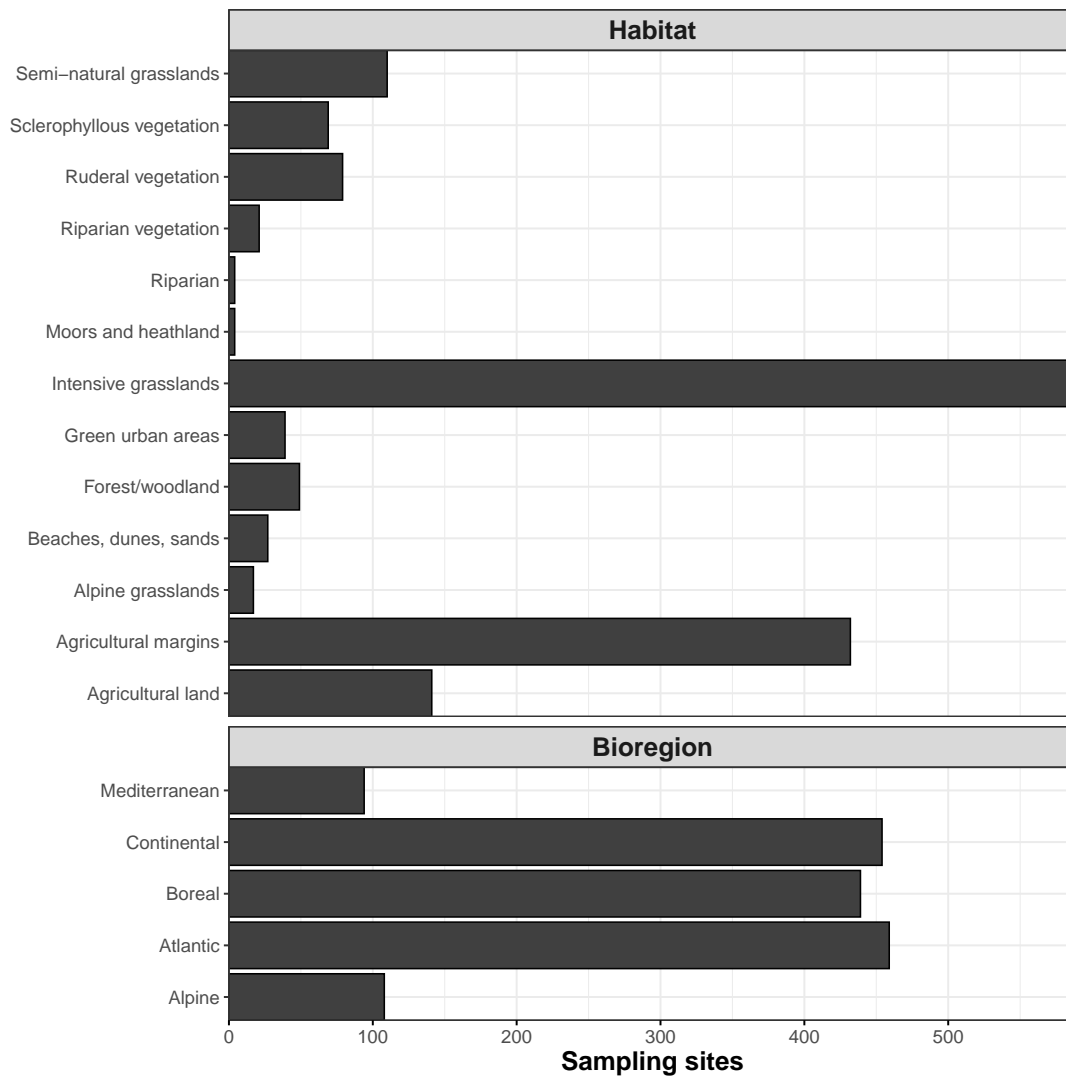
## Supplementary text 1

Habitat definitions:

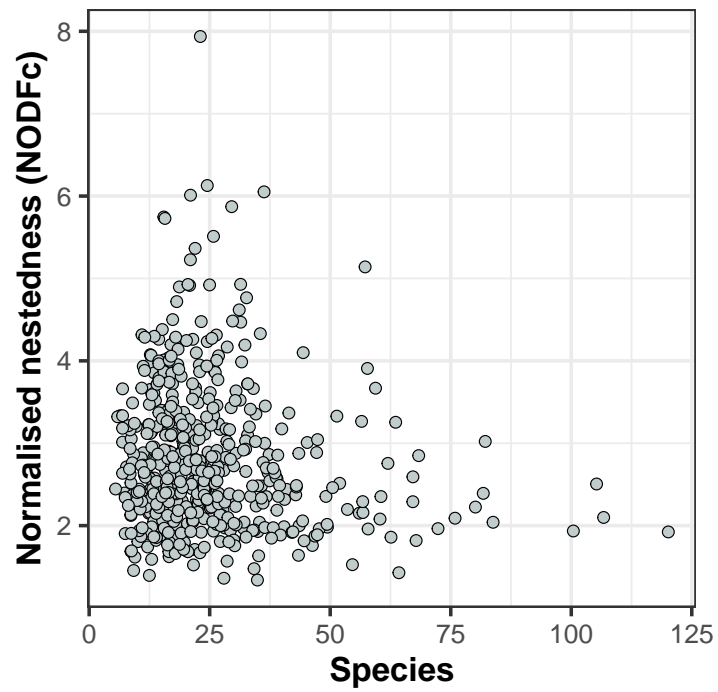
- 1) **Ruderal vegetation:** Plants growing on highly disturbed sites such as road sides or mineral extraction sites.
- 2) **Agricultural margins:** Sides of crops that can include any type of vegetation from low growing plants to trees.
- 3) **Green urban areas:** Parks, private gardens or small pastures within an urban setting. Botanical gardens are included in this category.
- 4) **Agricultural land:** Includes any type of crop and any type of vegetation growing within them.
- 5) **Forest/woodland understory:** Any plant community sampled under a wooded group of plants. The forest could be embedded in an agricultural setting or in a fully natural scenario. We have included in this category agro-forestry areas and open to dense forest. Note that we have excluded from this category forest that contains sclerophyllous vegetation.
- 6) **Semi-natural grassland:** Low growing plant community with relatively low disturbances but under low pressure such as seasonal mowing or extensive grazing.
- 7) **Intensive grassland:** Any type of low growing plant community that is highly influenced by human disturbance. For instance, agriculture, mowing, moderate to high grazing or urban environments. Note that this category also includes old pastures with regrowth of woody vegetation.
- 8) **Sclerophyllous vegetation:** Any type of system with a dominant shrub community adapted to drought. Typical of the Mediterranean region. Note, that we have included in this category also woodlands (open coniferous forest) where the shrub community was the main focus of the study.
- 9) **Beaches, dunes, sands:** Plant communities growing on sandy soil.
- 10) **Riparian vegetation:** Plant communities growing on river margins.
- 11) **Alpine grasslands:** Low growing plant communities with little or none human disturbance. Often located in high elevation areas within Europe.
- 12) **Moors and heathland:** Low growing woody vegetation characteristic from low fertile soils near the coast or in alpine areas.



**Figure S1.** Coverage of the EuPPollNet species for bees (family level), syrphids (subfamily level) and butterflies (family level) in relation to the total number of European species within these taxonomic groups.



**Figure S2.** Barplot indicating the number of sampling sites by habitat and bioclimatic region within the database.



**Figure S3.** Association between nestedness (NODFc) and the geometric mean of plan and pollinator species per network