US Beekeepers Lost almost Half their Honeybees last Year. What are the Causes?

By Global Research News
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GR Editor's Note.

This article provides important data, but it does examine the broader causes affecting bee colonies. In a recent GR article, the role of Neonicotinoid pesticides is highlighted as one of the causes:

> Neonicotinoid pesticides are a newer class of chemicals that are applied to seeds before planting. This allows the pesticide to be taken up through the plant's vascular system as it grows, where it is expressed in the pollen and nectar.
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> These insecticides are highly toxic to bees because they are systemic, water soluble, and pervasive. They get into the soil and groundwater where they can accumulate and remain for many years and present long-term toxicity to the hive as well as to other species, such as songbirds.
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> Neonicotinoids affect insects' central nervous systems in ways that are cumulative and irreversible. Even minute amounts can have profound effects over time.
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> The disappearance of bee colonies began accelerating in the United States shortly after the EPA allowed these new insecticides on the market in the mid-2000s. The lawsuit alleges that the EPA allowed the neonicotinoids to remain on the market despite clear warning signs of a problem.
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> http://www.globalresearch.ca/neonicotinoid-pesticides-ongoing-death-of-the-bees-epa-slapped-with-lawsuit/5334816

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by Melissa Breyer

The mysterious die-off of the nation's honeybees worsened last year, with a spike in summer deaths indicating a troubling new development.

Each year the Bee Informed Partnership in collaboration with the Apiary Inspectors of America conducts a survey among both commercial and backyard beekeepers to track the health and survival rates of their honeybee colonies.

What the results reveal for April 2014 to April 2015 are dismal. Beekeepers surveyed lost a total of 42.1 percent of their colonies during the period. And while winter loss rates dipped .6 percent (from 23.7 percent last year to 23.1 percent this year), summer loss rates increased significantly, from 19.8 percent to 27.4 percent, which is troubling. The health of bee colonies isn't getting better.

> "We traditionally thought of winter losses as a more important indicator of health, because surviving the cold winter months is a crucial test for any bee colony," said Dennis vanEngelsdorp, an etymologist from the University of Maryland and project director for the Bee Informed Partnership. "We expect the colonies to die during the winter, because that's a stressful season. What's totally shocking to me is that the losses in summer, which should be paradise for bees, exceeded the winter losses."

"Years ago, this was unheard of," he added.

The losses among small-scale beekeepers (those with fewer than 50 colonies) seems clearly related to the varroa mite, a pesky and deadly parasite that is contagious between colonies; but for commercial beekeepers, the reason behind the losses remain less clear.

"Backyard beekeepers were more prone to heavy mite infestations, but we believe that is because a majority of them are not taking appropriate steps to control mites," van Engelsdorp said. "Commercial keepers were particularly prone to summer losses. But they typically take more aggressive action against varroa mites, so there must be other factors at play."

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The survey, which is partially funded by the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture, is part of a comprehensive effort to understand what's going on with the honeybees and what can be done to help. While many of us consider the honeybee as the canary in the coalmine, colony losses represent significant economic threats to the livelihood of beekeepers and are of vast importance to a lot of the nation's crops as well. Things like almonds completely depend on honeybees for pollination.

A world without bees would be a world with much, much less food; we are more dependent on them than many people are aware of.

"The winter loss numbers are more hopeful especially combined with the fact that we have not seen much sign of Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) for several years," said Jeffery Pettis, a senior entomologist at U.S. Department of Agriculture and a co-coordinator of the survey. "But such high colony losses in the summer and year-round remain very troubling,"

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