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Researchers Closer to Solving Disappearing Bee Mystery

Pesticides are not to blame, scientists find

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Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) was the main topic of interest at the American Beekeeping Federation's first-ever National Beekeeping Conference, January 8-12 in Sacramento, California. Beekeepers exchanged stories of CCD decimating their hives, and scientists assured beekeepers that finding the cause of CCD is a top priority.

Best of all, before the conference was held a team of scientists led by researchers at Penn State University reported the search for the cause of CCD may be over. They have linked Israeli Acute Paralysis Virus (IAPV) to the vast majority of destroyed hives.

Devastating Colony Losses

CCD wiped out approximately 30 percent of the nation's managed bee colonies last year and has wiped out more than half since first appearing in 2004.

Bees play an integral role in the world food supply, providing pollination for 90 fruit and vegetable crops that in the United States alone generate \$14 billion in annual revenue for U.S. farmers. The almond crop in California, for example, requires and cannot survive without bee pollination.

Nearly All Had Virus

Scientists from Penn State University, Columbia University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service, and the University of Arizona now think they have found the most likely cause of the colony collapse disorder in IAPV.

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Although there are many other theories about the cause of the disorder, including fungi, bacteria, pesticides, and stress from moving colonies around for pollination work, IAPV appears to be the most likely cause.

IAPV is carried by the varroa mite, which may have come with bee colonies imported from Australia. Scientists from the Penn State team used genetic fingerprinting to identify IAPV in 96 percent of samplings from hive components destroyed by CCD.

Some colonies unaffected by CCD also tested positive for IAPV, but scientists believe that may be related to resistance or immunity, which occurs to a certain degree in most viral outbreaks.

Now Seeking Proof

The researchers noted in a Penn State news release, "the prevalence of IAPV genetic material in bees suffering from CCD, the timing of the outbreaks, and the geographical circumstances indicate that IAPV is a significant marker for CCD."

The next step is to verify the apparent role of IAPV is not a coincidence.

"While IAPV may be a marker for CCD, proving that any organism is the cause of IAPV [CCD] is somewhat more difficult. The researchers will now try to infect bee colonies with CCD [IAPV]," explained a Penn State press release.

Environmental Myth Exposed

"Environmental activists have recently claimed that the mysterious decline in honeybee populations was due to pesticides," said Dennis Avery, director of the Center for Global Food Issues and senior fellow of the Hudson Institute. "Of course, blaming pesticides has been the standard political tactic of the environmental movement since Rachel Carson wrongly blamed DDT for thinning the egg shells of eagles 40 years ago.

"Again, the activists blamed before they knew the answer," Avery continued. "That's their tactic: Find a problem, blame it on something they want to get rid of, and put that perception into the public mind before anyone has time to do real science on the real problems.

"The truth is that there are far more viruses, cycles, droughts, and climate shifts in the real world than we ever imagined 50 years ago when we started looking for 'environmental problems' to blame on humans," Avery noted.

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