

BEES AT RISK FROM CHEMICALS INCREASE

Friends of the Earth press release

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BEES AT RISK FROM CHEMICALS INCREASE

Pesticide use rose by 6.5% between 2005 and 2010, increasing the risk to bee populations, according to new research launched today by Friends of the Earth.

The report, 'The Decline of England's Bees' was carried out by leading bee experts at the University of Reading as part of the environment charity's latest campaign, The Bee Cause.

As well as an overall rise in pesticide use, the report reveals an increase in insecticides that tend to be used on crops pollinated by bees - increasing the risk to them. The report also shows the use of herbicides can destroy important sources of food for bees.

Bees are critical to Britain's food supply and economy, but numbers of some species have fallen dramatically in recent years. The report found that two British bumblebee species have become extinct, solitary bees have declined in over half the areas they were studied in and managed honey bee colonies fell by 53% between 1985 and 2005.

Research released last month by Friends of the Earth revealed it would cost the UK an extra £1.8billion every year to hand pollinate crops without bees.

Friends of the Earth is calling on David Cameron to produce a National Bee Action Plan to tackle bee decline. It says the PM should suspend those pesticides linked to bee deaths, make changes to the way impacts on bee health are assessed, and include targets for reducing use of pesticides.

The report, which also exposes other crucial areas where the Government must take action in the National Bee Action Plan to protect bees, concludes that 'perhaps the greatest shortcoming is the failure of government to fully recognise the importance and conservation needs of bees across the country.'

The report's findings reveal that the loss of lowland meadows and hedges and the destruction of local wildlife sites have removed vital sources of food and nesting sites for bees. Farmers urgently need more support to ensure a bee-friendly countryside, planning policy must be strengthened to protect bee habitats and there needs to be a new focus on supporting bee species other than managed honeybees.

The Bee Cause supporter, celebrity gardener and presenter of BBC's Bees, Butterflies and Blooms, Sarah Raven, said:

“Bees are vital to our food supply and our economy so it makes sense for us to do everything in our power to save them.

“Being bee-friendly in our gardens is a great way to create much-needed places for bees to live and to easily up the amount of food in the UK for them.

“Action in our gardens must be supported by action from Government to protect our British bees.”

Paul de Zylva, Nature Campaigner at Friends of the Earth said:

“It’s shocking that pesticide use is still on the rise on the very crops that bees visit most when their use is being increasingly linked to the decline in bee populations.

“As well as an overdue investigation into the impact of pesticides on bees, the Government must make urgent changes to the way we plan our towns and cities and farm our countryside so we can reverse their decline.

“To save our economy billions and give bees the best chance, David Cameron must commit to a National Bee Action Plan.”

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Notes to editors:

1. For a briefing on the full report visit

http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefings/bees_report_briefing.pdf. To access the full report, visit www.foe.co.uk/beesreport.

2. The Bee Cause campaign is supporting individuals to make change in their gardens and communities to help bees, and on the Prime Minister to commit to a National Bee Action Plan. To support the call to David Cameron and find out what else you can do to help bees, visit www.foe.co.uk/bees.

3. Pesticide use rose by 6.5% between 2005 and 2010 according to data from the Government’s Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA). Trends in the use of pesticides have varied strongly between crops over the past 5 years but overall pesticide use rose 6.5% due to increasing treatment intensity on a number of crops including those most pollinated by bees such as oilseeds (+26%). Herbicide use has increased on oilseeds by +78%.

4. Current assessments of chemical use on bee health consider the effect on honey bees but do not include other bee species nor the sub-lethal effects chemicals can have on different types of bee. Studies have also indicated that solitary bees could be more vulnerable to the impacts of insecticides than honey bees.

5. In March 2012 the journal Science published research by the University of Stirling which found an 85% rise in deaths of Queen bumblebees when subject to the neonicotinoid pesticide Imidacloprid. Studies: 'Neonicotinoid Pesticide Reduces Bumble Bee Colony Growth and Queen Production' (Whitehorn, et al 2012) and 'Pesticide exposure in honey bees results in increased levels of the gut pathogen Nosema' (Pettis et al 2012). Although use of imidacloprid has declined the use of other neonicotinoids such as Thiamethoxam and Clothianidin have increased substantially (FERA, 2012).

6. The number of managed honeybee colonies in the UK fell by 53% between 1985 and 2005 (Potts et al, 2010a) and wild honeybees are nearly extinct (Carreck, 2008). Solitary bee diversity has declined in 52% of UK landscapes (Beismeyer et al, 2006).

7. It would cost the UK £1.8billion to hand-pollinate our crops every year, if we lost bees. Read the full press release from April here:

http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/press_releases/uk_without_bees_11042012.html.

8. Sarah Raven's Bees, Butterflies and Blooms was broadcast in March 2012 on the BBC. For more information visit <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b013pw23>.

9. For more than 40 years we've seen that the wellbeing of people and planet go hand in hand – and it's been the inspiration for our campaigns. Together with thousands of people like you we've secured safer food and water, defended wildlife and natural habitats, championed the move to clean energy and acted to keep our climate stable. Be a Friend of the Earth – see things differently. To find out more visit our website at www.foe.co.uk.....