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31 comments

Pesticides starvation implicated in recent Oregon bee die-offs task force seeks solutions



Honey bees emerge from a healthy bee hive.

Casey O'Hara | cohara@oregonian.com (http://connect.oregonlive.com/staff/cohara/photos.html)

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Print (http://blog.oregonlive.com/environment_impact/print.html?entry=2014/07/pesticides_starvation_implicat.html)

(http://connect.oregonlive.com/staff/cohara/index.html) By Casey O'Hara | cohara@oregonian.com (http://connect.oregonlive.com/staff/cohara/posts.html)

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on July 02, 2014 at 6:00 AM, updated July 02, 2014 at 6:06 AM

Several highly publicized bee die-offs have increased concern for the health of Oregon's bee populations, prompting investigations and the establishment of a legislative task force to examine pesticide use and improve pollinator habitat in the state.

A collapse in bee population could destabilize food supplies, as about a third of all the food we eat is dependent on bee pollination. In Oregon, commercial and wild bees provide an estimated \$600 million in annual agricultural value.

And while pesticides have been implicated in several recent Oregon incidents, a number of other factors -- including starvation -- may be contributing to population declines in Oregon and across the country.

Pesticides implicated in bee deaths

Two recent incidents of mass bumblebee die-offs have been investigated by the **Oregon Department of Agriculture** (http://www.oregon.gov/oda/Pages/index.aspx) and were found to be the result of a pesticide containing the neonicotinoid compound imidacloprid.

Last summer's high profile bee die-off in Wilsonville

Got dead bees?

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Oil Trains



(http://topics.oregonlive.com/tag/oil-trains/posts.html)

Rob Davis takes an in-depth look at oil trains in the Pacific Northwest (http://topics.oregonlive.com/tag/oil-trains/posts.html)

In 2013, 19,065 tank cars moved more than 11M barrels of oil through Oregon. ... **More»** (http://topics.oregonlive.com/tag/oil-trains/posts.html)

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prompted the ODA to change the labeling on pesticides containing neonicotinoid ingredients, in particular the compounds imidacloprid and dinotefuran.

As of 2014, containers of pesticides containing these "neonics" bear a label prohibiting use on linden trees, basswood and other trees in the *Tilia* genus. These trees produce a mild natural toxin that is thought to amplify the pesticide's toxicity to bees.

But products made before 2014 still have the older labels, which allow for the pesticide to be used when plants are not in bloom.

Two weeks ago, Eugene residents found a thousand bumblebees dead and dying beneath blooming linden trees. ODA investigators determined that the chemical had been sprayed on the trees, in violation of label restrictions. The company responsible had their license suspended and may face fines, said ODA spokesman Bruce Pokarney.

Several days later, hundreds of dead bees were found in Beaverton, again under blooming linden trees. In this case, imidacloprid had been injected into the trees in May, prior to blooming, in apparent accordance with the restrictions noted on the pre-2014 label.

In response to these incidents, the ODA issued temporary restrictions June 26 prohibiting all use on linden and *Tilia* species, regardless of label, while ODA investigates and determines future regulatory actions.

Colony die-offs likely due to starvation

Recent reports of dead and dying beehives in the Portland area offer a deeper mystery.

Beekeeping hobbyist Dena Rash Guzman of Sandy despaired upon finding two of her eight beehives collapsed, with inches-deep layers of dead honeybees littering the bottom of the hives.

A number of other beekeepers in the area have reported similar symptoms.

Isaak Stapleton, investigator for the ODA pesticides program, and Dewey Caron, affiliate faculty in Oregon State University's horticulture department, visited Guzman's farm and several others to examine the afflicted hives.

Among several stress factors, Caron noted that the affected hives showed very little stored honey and pollen. "It could fairly be said that the colonies were living on the edge," Caron said, with worker bees collecting just enough food each day with no backup reserves.

While hive starvation is not uncommon in winter when food resources are scarce, it can also happen in seasons of abundance.

In blooming meadows of early summer, a bee colony with sufficient reserves can prosper and grow to a healthy population of 60,000 to 80,000. But for a colony on the edge, a few days of cool weather, such as those preceding the recent Portland-area hive deaths, could prevent bees from foraging and could tip the colony into starvation.

Stapleton sent samples of dead bees to the [OSU honeybee lab](http://honeybeelab.oregonstate.edu/) (<http://honeybeelab.oregonstate.edu/>) to be tested for presence of pesticides. While unwilling to rule out pesticides until test results are available, Caron said the evidence supported stress and starvation as a more likely cause of the sudden hive losses.

Bee declines and the task force

Caron, a longtime beekeeper, and OSU entomologist Ramesh Sagili both contribute data to the [Bee Informed Partnership](http://beeinformed.org/) (<http://beeinformed.org/>), a nationwide collaboration of research labs focused on declining bee populations. According to the partnership, over the past six years, Oregon beekeepers have lost on average 22 percent of their colonies each winter.

A few dead bees in an area is no cause for alarm. But if you find 50 or more dead bees in a single area, contact the [Oregon Department of Agriculture](http://www.oregon.gov/oda/) (<http://www.oregon.gov/oda/>): pestx@oda.state.or.us (<mailto:pestx@oda.state.or.us>) or (503) 986-6466.

Beekeepers experiencing unusual colony losses should contact the local beekeeping association or the [Oregon State Beekeepers Association](http://www.orsba.org/hdocs/home.php) (<http://www.orsba.org/hdocs/home.php>). If you suspect pesticides are involved, please contact the [ODA](http://www.oregon.gov/oda/) (<http://www.oregon.gov/oda/>).



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Top Portland tech CEO faces

While Oregon's colony losses are markedly lower than the national average of about 30 percent, they are still significantly higher than the 15 percent that beekeepers report as "acceptable."

Despite annual losses, Sagili notes that the overall number of hives has remained fairly consistent. Beekeepers can repopulate a lost colony by splitting a healthy hive, though the process is costly in time and money, putting economic pressure on Oregon's commercial beekeepers.

Sagili emphasizes that multiple stress factors add up to decreased colony health: poor nutrition due to extensive mono-crop agriculture and habitat loss; migratory stress as colonies are moved from crop to crop and state to state; and disease, fungus and parasitic *Varroa* mites.

Chronic low-level exposure to pesticides, especially neonicotinoids, may harm bees' ability to navigate while foraging and increase susceptibility to other stressors.

Last Tuesday, the **International Union for Conservation of Nature** (<http://www.iucn.org/>) released a **comprehensive analysis** (http://www.iucn.org/news_homepage/?16025/Systemic-Pesticides-Pose-Global-Threat-to-Biodiversity-And-Ecosystem-Services) examining hundreds of studies, concluding neonicotinoids "are causing significant damage to a wide range of beneficial invertebrate species and are a key factor in the decline of bees."

On Monday, the Oregon Task Force on Pollinator Health, created in response to last summer's bee die-offs, held its first organizational meeting.

The task force, which includes representatives from the state legislature, nurseries, industry, beekeepers and environmental groups, will meet several more times to investigate such items as best practices in pesticide use and how to increase pollinator habitat.

-- Casey O'Hara



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Vancouver police officer, shot seven times, still able to describe shooting

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ZuluDawn (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/factorxlives/index.html>) 34 minutes ago
<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/factorxlives/index.html>)
 It's quite amusing how the "pro-science" minority of the population can fail to recognize that pesticides are a product of science. It's true. You can look it up.

Like Reply

ZenThis (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/ZenThis/index.html>) 1 hour ago
<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/ZenThis/index.html>)
 First off, excellent article. OK, sorry to chime in so late, just got to reading today. I have had a successful Warre hive for three years...until this last winter. I can empathize with those that have lost theirs. The bees had plenty of honey reserves to last and as late as February I was able to hear the low buzz of the colony. But come April no sound, only a bottom tray full of dead bees. I was saddened by this turn of events, but went about prepping the hive for a new

colony, unfortunately, no local swarms were immediately available. That too, seems to be a problem although no real statistical data can support my experience. Anecdotaly, there are significantly less bees moving through our neighborhood here in rural Happy Valley.

I would like to contact some group about a proposal that I would have for placing hives as part of a non-profit where the honey would be sold and the revenue passed on to those serving the growing homeless population.

Casey, would you be able to direct me to the proper channel? Thanks again for this piece.

Peace,
ZenThis

Like Reply

Sunday (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/Summer1965/index.html>) 7 hours ago

A legislative taskforce will be a waste of money and accomplish nothing. Anything the government is involved in will not work properly, but will waste a lot of money.

1  (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/factorxlives/index.html>) Like Reply

forbalance 7 hours ago

Perhaps a blip on the radar, but the majority of my urban neighbors no longer take time to create gardens, flower beds, planters, etc. which attract bees. Our neighborhood landscapes have become barren rock beds, grass, and evergreen shrubs. I've noticed a reduction in honey bees in my garden as the surrounding neighborhood is not supportive as it was a few years ago.

Like Reply

Dinoslayer (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/kevin1006/index.html>) 7 hours ago

This one has become a slam dunk: The data is so clear on this issue that the only people denying are the usual righties that seem to take great pride in their willful ignorance. The international community of scientists are calling for the complete ban of certain classes of pesticides because the evidence is so clear at this stage:

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/05/140509110713.htm>
(<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/05/140509110713.htm>)

And...

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/01/140127122825.htm>
(<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/01/140127122825.htm>)

There's plenty more if one cares to find it.

The denial of some is laughable... and sad.

1  Like Reply

 **Sunday** (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/Summer1965/index.html>) 6 hours ago

(<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/Summer1965/index.html>)
@Dinoslayer (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/kevin1006/index.html>) Of course scientists are calling for a ban. They only keep their jobs if they preach doom and gloom. Most of these people can't get a job in the private sector so they will do anything to keep the tax dollars flowing.

Like Reply

 **Michael Pitts-Campbell** (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/mppittscampbell/index.html>) 5 hours ago

@Sunday (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/Summer1965/index.html>) @Dinoslayer (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/kevin1006/index.html>) Damn them pointy-headed intellectuals, startin' with Pie-tha-goras. Don't need no modern larning, Pastor Bob will tell me ev'rything I need to know.

Like Reply

 **Kurt Steiner** 5 hours ago

@Dinoslayer (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/kevin1006/index.html>) Agreed. But oh, how the gargantuan chemical companies are going to fight this tooth and nail. Good thing our government doesn't take millions from them and look the other way on these issues. Ahem.

Like Reply

 **ZuluDawn** (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/factorxlives/index.html>) 2 hours ago

(<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/factorxlives/index.html>)
@Dinoslayer Another inoronic liberal. I'm a "righty" and I'm for the ban of all pesticides. Aren't pesticides the glorious offering of science in the first

place? Of course they are, which is why calling you a moron is fact. If only we could legalize genocide at the same time this country would be a better place.

Like Reply

Must_B_Rain

9 hours ago

Thanks for the "starvation" work. Are you sure it wasn't some conservatives who took a break from the "War on Women" to kill them out of blood lust? Or, it could be that really cold winters cause a die-off this time of year (uh-huh).

Be careful Mr. Author, you could set off a crap storm of enviro-nuts if they think that evil pesticides are on the loose...(even though they already do).

Like Reply



Sunday (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/Summer1965/index.html>) 7 hours ago
(<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/Summer1965/index.html>)

@Must_B_Rain Most environmentalists are democrats.

Like Reply

Jeffrey Rosas (http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/jeffrey_rosas/index.html) 10 hours ago

Thank you for the article. This is an important issue.

I think it may be confusing to the ongoing discussion to use the verb "collapse" outside the context of "colony collapse disorder," which is a situation in which worker bees disappear and there is an absence of dead bees in the hive, not "inches-deep layers of dead honeybees littering the bottom of the hives."

I think it's helpful to the discussion to refer to neonicotinoids specifically as "insecticides" rather than the more general term "pesticide" so that people understand that these are products that are specifically targeted to kill insects. I also think it is helpful for people to understand that bees collect nectar and make honey by evaporating about 75% of the water from the nectar, and while I have seen insecticide manufacturers and their supporters in government and among beekeeping groups talk about below-lethal levels of neonics found in nectar, I have not seen a single person address the issue of the concentration of neonics in the honey bees eat and feed to their brood.

Finally, on the starvation issue, at least one writer (Michael Bush) in 2011, has posited that Tylosin and organic acids used to treat nosema and american foul brood are killing microbes inside the bees and making them unable to digest honey.

Like Reply



Casey O'Hara | cohara@oregonian.com (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/cohara/index.html>) 9 hours ago

@Jeffrey Rosas (http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/jeffrey_rosas/index.html) Excellent points, thanks for the clarifications. I was hesitant about using the term "collapse," as you said, though many of the experts I spoke with used it to refer to general hive failure, so I included it. It is clear that none of these incidents shows symptoms of CCD. Thanks also for contributing to an informative discussion of the related issues!

Like Reply



turbotorque (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/turbotorque/index.html>) 7 hours ago

(<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/turbotorque/index.html>)
@Jeffrey Rosas (http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/jeffrey_rosas/index.html) These "beekeepers" do not use tylosin. They do not treat for mites.

Sadly, It also appears that they do not monitor nutrition.

They starved their bees pure and simple.

No CCD, no pesticides; starvation

If you see a dead cow laying out in the middle of a bare field that also has never been fed hay and is skin and bones, is that pesticides?

They were allowed to starve.

Like Reply

turbotorque (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/turbotorque/index.html>) 12 hours ago

All of the answers to the colony crashes can be found in the picture of the top bar (junk) frame. Not a single cell of food.

Beekeeper just set back and let 'em starve. Oh and then blame it on pesticides.

Go back to bee school and listen this time!

2 () (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/Shazbatt79/index.html>) Like Reply

gnuut (<http://connect.user/gnuut/index.html>)

12 hours ago

I moved to Sauvie Island ten years ago, and kayaked around the Willamette frequently.

During spring and summer, you will find dead and dying bees lying on the surface there literally every few feet.

It has been obvious for years that the pesticides used by the commercial farms on the island are killing off the bees they need to pollinate their crops. Thanks a lot, Kruegers.

1  (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/kevin1006/index.html>) Like Reply

thomas green (http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/al_green_2/index.html)

12 hours ago

A nation of amnesiacs wakes up and is shocked by what's been happening!

Good Morning, Amnesica, how are ya'?

Don't you know me?

1  (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/kevin1006/index.html>) Like Reply

soapbox55

12 hours ago

I really think we need to learn to live with a little less pesticides. Bees may not be the only pollinators, but we still need them if we want to survive.

1  (http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/kyoto_kid/index.html) Like Reply

HoloceneMan (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/HoloceneMan/index.html>)

12 hours ago

And I should have lead with this: Very good article which stands on it's own...well reported and an important topic. The fact that The Oregonian has put you all in the predicament of having to justify your paycheck based not on your words, but on the number of comments by readers such as me detracts a bit from the value of your work...but not entirely. Keep up the good reporting on such important matters.

Like Reply

HoloceneMan (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/HoloceneMan/index.html>)

13 hours ago

This new obsession with having the writers solicit comments has gotten out of hand. Do you really want the reader to guess what else you learned through a guessing game and exchange of questions? If there was more good info, the author should have included it. If the readers want to do research, it will not likely be through a cat and mouse exchange with the author.

Like Reply



Casey O'Hara | cohara@oregonian.com (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/cohara/index.html>)

10 hours ago

@HoloceneMan (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/HoloceneMan/index.html>) Not saying I entirely disagree! But as I mentioned in response to another comment that for stories like this, I could have written thousands of words (and did, before editing it down). But many of the tangents and details might not be of interest to most readers. Comments can help identify the readers' interests, which in some cases might even lead to followup stories. And job security ;)

Like Reply

EschewObfuscation

13 hours ago

Backyard gardeners can install nesting boxes for Mason bees. These 'blue bees' are industrious pollinators, and seem more resilient to the various maladies plaguing honeybees.

Bees aren't the only known pollinators. Even flies will pollinate crops. Ever since two of my adjacent neighbors began raising their own chickens, the flies that always come with them have helped me grow more squash and cucumbers by buzzing from one flower to the next; just like a bee (albeit not nearly as good looking)...

1  (http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/kyoto_kid/index.html) Like Reply

FluffyFirview (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/FluffyFirview/index.html>)

14 hours ago

Why are they spraying non food trees with pesticides? Who cares if there are bugs in parking lot trees? It's not like they are destroying food supply.

Like Reply



Byrond2 (http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/byron_delaney/index.html)

13 hours ago

@FluffyFirview (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/FluffyFirview/index.html>) If the sap gets on cars people think their cars are damaged and might not park and shop and whatnot. People are not very smart.

1  (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/kevin1006/index.html>) Like Reply**oswego62**

7 hours ago

@Byrond2 (http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/byron_delaney/index.html) **@FluffyFirview** (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/FluffyFirview/index.html>) You have to wonder why businesses would plant trees in the parking lots that they know will either drop sap onto cars, or attract aphids that are nuisances to people who park. There are plenty of tree specie that are suited to parking lots that don't cause the problems they're saying were the cause of these incidents.

Like Reply

Byrond2 (http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/byron_delaney/index.html) 14 hours ago

My backyard hive in Beaverton collapsed toward the end of last year and the bees had loads of honey stored when they died. My hive (not used now) is a high-end top bar hive with a winter floor and I never collected any honey because I wanted them to have enough to eat. They were doing great until sometime after the many linden trees bloomed. I do seem to remember seeing one of those pesticide people sticking their pesticide rod into the ground at the base of a linden tree. I'm sure at least some of the linden trees had systemic pesticides applied to them. People in Oregon urban areas use lots of terrible pesticides. It's a fact.

1  (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/wewilliewinky/index.html>) Like Reply**Casey O'Hara | cohara@oregonian.com** (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/cohara/index.html>) 10 hours ago

@Byrond2 (http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/byron_delaney/index.html) Sorry to hear about your hive. While the details of your case would need to be examined by an expert, your concern is not unfounded: neonic pesticides are sometimes applied at the base of the tree (or into the bark of the tree); they break down slowly and are water soluble, so they are carried up into the plant through the roots and even into the nectar. This protects the plant from damaging insects long term, though creates chronic low-level exposure for pollinators, which might add stress to an otherwise healthy hive. For lindens and other Tiliacs, the natural toxins augment the pesticide, so the nectar and pollen can in some cases become deadly to bees. This is what appears to have happened in Beaverton this year, and Hillsboro last year, and an issue the new ODA regs seek to address. Also, from what I understand, lindens are more attractive to bumblebees than honeybees in general...

Like Reply

goodbyeoregon (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/wewilliewinky/index.html>) 14 hours ago

Good story. Can the public expect food costs to rise in the short term or long term?

1  (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/gnuut/index.html>) Like Reply**Casey O'Hara | cohara@oregonian.com** (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/cohara/index.html>) 14 hours ago

Good morning, I hope you find the story interesting! There's a lot more information I wasn't able to fit into an 800-word story, and I spoke with many knowledgeable people when putting together the story, so please post followup questions or your own thoughts on bees, pollinator health, and pesticides. --Casey

1  (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/gnuut/index.html>) Like Reply**Peasant Pundit** (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/Unfleaf/index.html>) 12 hours ago

@Casey O'Hara | cohara@oregonian.com (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/cohara/index.html>) I can understand word limits for print stories; what's the factor here? Why is it the comments section can run into tens of thousands of words; but the story is capped under a thousand? Interesting.

Like Reply

**Casey O'Hara | cohara@oregonian.com** (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/cohara/index.html>) 10 hours ago

@Peasant Pundit (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/Unfleaf/index.html>) **@Casey O'Hara | cohara@oregonian.com** (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/cohara/index.html>) at stake: a fine balance between timeliness, accuracy, and depth... Because of my science background, I tend to find these topics fascinating, so I could write thousands of words on every story... but how many people would stick around to read the whole article?

Like Reply

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