

Scientists search for cause of bee deaths

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A U.S. scientist says parasites, pathogens and pesticides are all possible suspects in the recent staggering decline in the number of the world's honeybees.

Scientists are struggling to understand the reason for the decline in honeybees in the United States as well as in European and Asian nations this winter.

Cornell University Associate Professor of entomology Nicholas Calderone said while many bees this year exhibited symptoms of mite damage, about 25 percent of the deaths could not be attributed to mites or any other known honeybee pest.

Finding the cause of the problem is vital for U.S. agriculture, since many fruit, vegetable and seed crops -- worth between \$8 billion and \$12 billion annually -- rely on honeybees for pollination.

"Just like in the immediate aftermath of a natural disaster, there are a lot of conflicting and inaccurate reports," said Calderone. "What we do know is that there are an awful lot of dead bees. We are looking for patterns."

Genetically modified foods, mites, pathogens, pesticides and even electromagnetic radiation from cell phones have all been proposed as possible causes of the bees' demise. But, Calderone said, the actual causes are still unknown.

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