

# Bees at risk from chemicals increase, scientists say

May 24 2012

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

The report, The Decline of England's Bees was carried out by leading bee experts at 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 from Reading 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.

Simon Potts, Professor of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, who co-authored the report alongside colleagues at Reading, said: "Research from the University of Reading and elsewhere has shown the multiple problems that are facing Britain's bee population.

"This is a big problem that needs a combined effort by national and local government, businesses and individuals to make a difference."

Professor Potts is a leading bee expert who has been studying bees and pollination services for 25 years. His team of 30 people at the University of Reading are conducting research to help develop policy and management practices to better protect bees and manage the services they provide.

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

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."

**More information:** [Read a briefing](#) of the report or access the [full report](#).

Provided by University of Reading

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