

Pesticides stop bees learning

Scientists have found that pesticides harm the ability of bees to find food. Bees must learn which flowers contain nectar (their food) from the smell of the flowers. If the bees do not learn which scents mean food, they will starve. Researchers at the University of Dundee in Scotland and Newcastle University in England found that pesticides used by farmers and gardeners can switch off the part of a bee's brain that is responsible for associating smells with food. Lead researcher Dr Geraldine Wright said pesticides could seriously impact the survival of honeybee colonies. She said, "bees that cannot learn will not be able to find food". This also means bees will not pollinate crops and wild plants.

Bee populations around the world have been declining. Scientists have searched for a long time for a reason why so many bees are disappearing. This new research may be an important clue. However, the British government does not want to stop the use of the pesticides that may prevent bees from learning. It wants to carry out more tests to make sure pesticides are the real reason for the reduction in the number of bees. A spokeswoman from the Friends Of The Earth charity said the government must act sooner rather than later. "Bee health is far too urgent to wait until more research has been completed. [Controls] should be placed on these pesticides until bee safety can be [guaranteed]," she said.

Discussion Questions

- How important is the sense of smell? Is it the same for all animals?
- What is the most important sense for most animals?
- Why do you think the British government does not want to stop the use of pesticides?
- What will happen if Bees go extinct?