

UCSD Study Shows Common Pesticide Damages Honey Bees' Ability to Fly

The study discovered the first evidence that this broadly-used pesticide can harm bee flight.

By Anna Conkey



A study conducted by biologists at UCSD shows how a common pesticide impairs the ability of honey bees to fly.

“Our results provide the first demonstration that field-realistic exposure to this pesticide alone, in otherwise healthy colonies, can alter the ability of bees to fly,” said UCSD postdoctoral researcher Simone Tosi, a co-author of the study, in a statement.

Flight Mill



It was published Tuesday by UCSD Researcher Simone Tosi, Biology Professor

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James Nieh and Associate Professor Giovanni Burgio, from the University of Bologna, Italy.

The study describes in detail how Neonicotinoid pesticides is hurting honey bees.

Neonicotinoid is a relatively new form of insecticides commonly used on grains, fruit, vegetables and other crops to kill insects, according to the study.

In the past the insecticide was thought to not have a negative impact on honey bees because of its low toxicity levels, but this new research proves otherwise.

"Honey bee survival depends on its ability to fly because that's the only way they can collect food. Their ability to fly is also crucial to guarantee crop and wild plant pollination," said Tosi.

For over a decade scientists have been searching for the cause of Honey Bee Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD), which occurs when worker bees disappear, leaving behind food, their queen bee, bee larvae and not enough nurse bees to care for the hive.

UCSD biologists aimed to test whether neonicotinoids are a possible factor. They used a bee flight testing instrument called a flight mill. This allows the researchers to test the bees' ability to fly under consistent and controlled conditions.

Long term exposure to the pesticide over one or two days showed the distance, duration and velocity of bee flight were significantly altered, according to the study.

Short term exposure caused an increase in activity levels for a short amount of time, but their behavior was erratic and they flew farther from their hive, according to the study.

"Bees that fly more erratically for greater distances may decrease their probability of returning home," said James Nieh, a UCSD biology professor and co-author of the study.

The decline in honey bee populations is cause for concern because of its close association with the human diet and nutrition, said Nieh.

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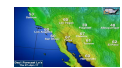
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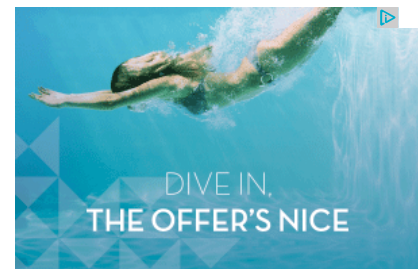
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