

explainity explains: “The Death Of Bees“

This is Billie, an urban honey bee.

The atmosphere over here is not very nice, traffic is noisy, and humans often treat her mean – but despite this she and her family seem to live decently here.

Sadly, things often don't seem to be going so well for her relatives in the countryside and some other bee species. We keep hearing about bee deaths.

However, this seems to be a regional problem. Looking at the overall count of bee colonies in parts of Europe and North America, their population is indeed in decline - but globally it is rising. So, these excessive bee deaths are a specific problem affecting certain species and not all bees. The causes for this are diverse.

Let us start with why bees matter so much. Not only do bees produce honey; they are also mainly responsible for keeping our ecosystem running. By pollinating plants, these plants are then able to reproduce and grow and provide vegetables and fruit.

But Billie and the other urban bees can't manage this on their own. The task requires many bee colonies, especially in the countryside, and specifically wild bees, which are the only ones to pollinate certain plants. And without bees, there would be no flowers, no plants and, in the long run, not enough food.

Why do urban bees like Billie apparently seem to be doing better than bees in the countryside?

These days, industrial agriculture uses pesticides to protect crops from unwanted insects. The insects die. But because bees are insects too, those same pesticides harm them too and they can also die. Billie, living his big city life, is generally unaware of this struggle.

Furthermore, bees need nectar from different types of plants. In the countryside, the vast fields, dedicated to one single crop, don't provide bees with food and shelter, so the colony gets weaker and is at risk of starvation.

Another danger comes from parasites, which sometimes travel via bee trading from other countries. The already weakened bees don't know how to defend themselves against the foreign enemy, so they become ill and die.

Bee colonies bred for industry are put under even greater stress when, in order to pollinate fields, they have to travel long distances and, upon reaching their destination, again find only one kind of plant.

Another issue scientists are investigating is the mobile phone radiation on the stress level of bees.

Bees also like it when it is nice and cold in winter and the mild temperatures caused by climate change, often don't do them any good.

On top of all these things, former honey producers face competition from cheaper, imported honey. That's why they give up on bee farming.

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It is therefore crucial to preserve the bees' natural habitat in the countryside.

Poisonous pesticides also need to vanish from agriculture. Smaller crop fields, which provide space for wild flowers and weeds to grow round the edges, are a solution to provide nesting space and diverse foods. That way, the bee can regain strength and resilience to fight parasites and other diseases successfully. So that, ultimately, bees in the countryside will be just as healthy as Billie the big city bee.