

Honeybees and Colony Collapse Disorder

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In recent years, reports have suggested a worldwide problem in which large numbers of honeybee colonies are mysteriously dying off. Some reports indicate losses of 30 to 90 percent of managed bee colonies. This unexplained cause of death has been given the name “Colony Collapse Disorder,” or CCD.

New scientific reports have announced a significant connection between the Israeli Acute Paralysis Virus (IAPV) and CCD, but much work remains to be done to determine exactly how the virus is involved in the problem and to develop a solution. The extent of the CCD problem in Harris County and in the state of Texas is not clear.

Removing Problem Hives from Buildings

News about CCD has raised public awareness about the important role of honeybees in plant pollination. A homeowner facing the unwelcome discovery of a hive of bees in the walls or attic of a house may wonder whether it is possible to protect family and property and at the same time save the colony by relocating it. Two problems should be considered regarding the removal of problem hives.

(1) Despite the current alarm about CCD, there does not seem to be any significant interest by commercial beekeepers (at least in Harris County) to salvage problem hives. Attempting to salvage hives from buildings is difficult, expensive and not very often successful. Very few beekeepers in Harris County show any interest in such attempts. Accordingly most people with problem hives will have to resort to the service of exterminators to eliminate the problem honeybee hive.

(2) Carpentry services will almost always be needed in order to remove the hive materials, which will usually be very extensive (see link to photos under Resources below). As these materials in the walls decay, they will produce strong unpleasant odors. Unless access holes and residual hive materials are removed, the vacated hive can also be reinhabited by another colony.

For those who feel very strongly about attempting to salvage a problem hive, we advise you contact the



Extension Master Gardener Entomologist at 281.855.5600 on Tuesday or Thursday mornings. If there are any beekeepers willing to assist you he will be able to provide up-to-date contact information.

What can the public do to help honeybees?

The best action you can take to benefit honeybees is to try to protect them from insecticides. Use spray applications instead of dusts. Utilize proper application procedures and don't use pesticides indiscriminately. Apply sprays when plants are not in bloom. When spraying is necessary, avoid using pesticides at midday when honeybees are most likely to be out foraging for nectar.

Resources

General information about honeybees:

Texas A&M University honeybee information
<http://honeybee.tamu.edu/index.html>

Missouri Botanical Gardens; Kemper Center for Home Gardening
<http://www.mobot.org/gardeninghelp/plantfinder/factsheet.asp?code=20>

More information about CCD:

USDA Colony Collapse Disorder Action Plan
http://www.ars.usda.gov/is/br/ccd/ccd_actionplan.pdf

USDA Agricultural Research Service; Q&As about CCD
<http://www.ars.usda.gov/News/docs.htm?docid=15572>

FAQs Colony Collapse Disorder – Indiana Dept Natural Resources
<http://www.in.gov/dnr/entomolo/pdfs/CCDFAQ.pdf>

Photos showing extent of bee colony hive construction inside walls of buildings:

Note that, although this site refers to Africanized bees, non-Africanized bees utilize identical hive construction methods.

http://www.stingshield.com/nesting_sites.htm



Gardening fact sheets are distributed by Harris County Master Gardeners, community volunteers trained in basic horticulture by Texas Cooperative Extension. For information about Master Gardener volunteer training classes, call Harris County Cooperative Extension at 281.855.5600, or send an e-mail to harris@ag.tamu.edu.