**Read this source and then click on the clink at the end to answer the questions about the source. Any words with \* after it means that the definition is at the end of the source.**

**The Honeybee**

**The writer of this letter is responding to an article entitled ‘Buzz off, see if I care’, about the disappearance of bees.**

Dear Sir,

I was appalled by your article regarding that most fascinating of insects, the honeybee. You reveal your ignorance by dismissing\* the potential demise\* of honeybees as part of a ‘natural cycle’ – crassly\* celebrating that your picnic is ‘less likely to be disturbed by nasty buzzy things’. Firstly, if it weren’t for bees, your picnic probably wouldn’t exist. Over 30% of world crops rely on bee pollination – apples, nuts, and all our favourite summer fruits like cherries and strawberries. Your peanut butter and jam sandwich would be looking a bit thin if bees disappeared altogether, wouldn’t it?

Perhaps you might like to consider that the extinction of bees could lead to widespread global starvation. We need to understand the value of bees and the precarious\* state of their existence. We could lose a lot of healthy food from our world or wind up paying exorbitant\* costs for farmers to use some other, less efficient, pollination technique to replace the work of these natural pollinators. Passing from flower to flower searching for nectar, bees transfer pollen on their fur, as they pollinate plants. Bees are effectively unpaid labour for the global food industry. Plus, bee health tells us lots about environmental health – the decimation\* of honeybee colonies worldwide is serious.

You’re right that honeybees aren’t native to many parts of the world, but were introduced by settlers. What you haven’t understood is that the honeybee is one of the oldest forms of animal life still in existence from the Neolithic Age. Over 500 Egyptian medicines used honey. The earliest records of man interacting with bees are rock paintings in Spain thought to be 8,000 years old. Modern picnicman has responsibilities here.

As you say, wild bees can be significant pollinators of plants and crops, but their numbers have decreased too. Should honeybees become extinct, their wild cousins are unlikely to be around to help.

Millions of bees abandoning hives, flying off to die, is a comparatively recent phenomenon. Known as Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD), it’s unlike anything seen before. Bee keepers find beehives virtually empty. The few bees left inside the hive carry almost every known bee virus, as well as fungal infections. It’s as if bees’ immune systems are being suppressed somehow. Perhaps, like ants, bees flee their colonies when they sense they’re diseased. Honeybees may have too little genetic diversity, making the species as a whole susceptible\* to widespread disease.

You incorrectly claim GM crops and radiation from mobile phones damage bees, overlooking the bee’s worst enemy, a blood-sucking mite called Varroa Destructor. This renders\* the bee susceptible\* to a deformed wing virus and is certainly a main suspect in this murder mystery.

Misleading readers, you say pesticides aren’t necessarily a death sentence for bees. The pesticides you refer to are insect nerve agents, used as seed dressings, which means they end up in every part of the crop they protect, including pollen and nectar. Even if properly applied, these chemicals cannot be used safely. Just small amounts are thought to fog bees’ brains, altering behaviour fatally.

In some regions of the world, chemicals are so widely used that all the bees have disappeared; fruit trees are pollinated by vast armies of human workers. Elsewhere, remaining beehives are routinely stacked up on trucks and transported around the country to pollinate orchard after orchard. This is almost certainly causing bees to suffer from stress and is bound to depress their immune system, expose them to additional disease and affect their navigational abilities. A changing climate and bizarre local weather systems also threaten bees.

Bees need a habitat with bee-friendly flowers for good nutrition. You’re wrong to suggest that urban beekeeping is the answer to honeybee decline. More honeybees in the city could just mean less nectar available to the wild bee population.

Nowadays, most scientists believe CCD results from an unfortunate cocktail of multiple causes working to increase stress and reduce honeybees’ immune systems.

Yours faithfully,

J. C. Brown

\*dismissing – to not treat something seriously \*demise –the death/downfall of something \*crassly – showing little intelligence/sensitivity \*precarious – in a dangerous situation \*exorbitant – extremely high prices \*decimation – killing/destruction of a large population \*suppressed – prevented \*susceptible – more easily affected \*renders – causes to become

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