



Pesticides Trigger Death of the Bees. Corporate Corruption in Pesticide Research

Scientists Who Do Not Link Pesticides to Bee Deaths Are Often Funded by the Agrochemical Industry

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'Syngenta and Bayer have a substantial amount of influence in the debate,' said one neurobiology researcher in response to a Greenpeace analysis of corporate corruption in pesticide research.

Pesticide manufacturers have spent millions influencing researchers who are investigating the role of neonicotinoids, a nicotine-like chemical found in many major pesticides, in bee die-offs, according to a recent analysis by Greenpeace.

The analysis arrives just weeks after scientists released the results of a long-term study that shows neonicotinoids are extremely dangerous to wild bees in the United Kingdom.



A bumble bee perches on rape blossoms near Munich, southern Germany. A new study shows that scientists funded by pesticide makers downplayed the role pesticides had in decimating worldwide bee populations.

Bayer and Syngenta, two of the world's top manufacturers of neonicotinoid-based pesticides, gave over £2 million (over \$2.6 million) to British universities engaged in

research on pesticides and plant sciences between 2011 and the start of 2016, reported [Joe Sandler Clarke](#), a journalist for Greenpeace's Energydesk, on Aug. 29.

"Syngenta and Bayer have a substantial amount of influence in the debate," Dr. Christopher Connolly, a reader in neurobiology at Scotland's Dundee University, told Clarke.

Energydesk sent Freedom of Information requests to 135 universities, requesting details on studies funded by Bayer or Syngenta, and heard back from 70 institutions. Among the top recipients of corporate funding were Nottingham University, which received £557,500 from Syngenta for research into plant sciences between 2011 and 2015, and Reading University, which received £587,952 for similar research during the same period.

Dave Goulson, a professor of biology at Sussex University, acknowledged that it's difficult to measure the exact extent of corporate influence in his field. However, he told Clarke:

It does seem to be the case that research funded by agrochemical companies rarely seems to find evidence that their products harm the environment, while independently-funded research often finds major adverse effects caused by the same products.

He further acknowledged: "Scientists are under huge pressure to obtain research funding and so are naturally likely to be keen to keep their funders happy."

Scientists increasingly confident that 'neonicotinoids are harmful'

While it appears some researchers were taking corporate money to follow an agribusiness agenda, others continue to document the harm caused by neonicotinoids.

Neonicotinoid pesticides were [banned from use on all flowering plants in the European Union in 2013](#). A team of seven scientists recently compared wild bee populations to levels of neonicotinoid use on oilseed rape crops in the U.K. between 1994 and 2011. The study, published Aug. 16 in the science journal [Nature Communications](#) and led by the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, showed that the populations of dozens of wild bee species declined significantly as the use of neonicotinoid pesticides increased, with the populations of one species down as much as 30 percent.

"[T]he average decline in population across all 62 species was 7.0 percent, but the average decline among 34 species that forage on oilseed rape was higher, at 10 percent," reported [Kate Kelland](#), a Reuters journalist who attended a press conference led by Ben Woodcock, who co-led the study.

Woodcock told reporters:

Prior to this, people had an idea that something might be happening, but no one had an idea of the scale. [Our results show that] it's long-term, it's large scale, and it's many more species than we knew about before.

Connolly, the neurobiologist interviewed by Greenpeace, has also authored important research into the effects of neonicotinoid pesticides. In April, he and seven other researchers released a [study in the journal Scientific Reports](#) which showed two major

neonicotinoids, Bayer's imidacloprid and Syngenta's thiamethoxam, have [harmful effects on bee populations](#) and the brain cells of individual bees. Surprisingly, a third chemical, Bayer's clothianidin, appeared to actually increase the number of queens produced by a colony.

Connolly, who supports an ongoing ban on all neonicotinoid pesticides, including those containing clothianidin, praised the recent study by Woodcock and company. "The evidence against neonicotinoids now exists in key bee brain cells involved in learning and memory, in whole bees, entire colonies and now at the level of whole populations of wild bees," he told Kelland.

Overall, there seems to be growing consensus among scientists that neonicotinoids pose a threat to bees. Dr. Nick Isaac, lead researcher of the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology's study, told Greenpeace's Clarke:

"Neonicotinoids are harmful. We can be very confident about that."

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