Colony Collapse Disorder in the United States by Glenn Farrier

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2006. A honeybee crawls out of a pale blue hive and takes off into the spring. Her sisters' dance points her toward blooming almond trees, lace flowers pinned the length of every delicate branch. She lands on one of the slim pink boas and bathes her feet in pollen. Laden with food for her colony, she prepares to fly back to the hive.

However, a sharp new taste is present in the yellow dust. An air of unease spreads within her body, and when she takes to the air, she's no longer sure which way her home is. The road that used to be clear is now blurry, and after several turns in the sky, it's lost for good. The bee cuts a hectic path of confusion through the almond orchard, trying to pick up a clue, some indicator of the way home. However, the poison that has unraveled her senses is unsparing, and, as the sun is leaning back towards the horizon, she falls to the ground.

The almond grove becomes a graveyard under a hail of dying bees. Bustling hives begin to go quiet, as the cloud of insects that surrounds them grows thin and powerless. One day, the beekeeper opens the lid to find a scene of quiet devastation. There isn't a pile of dead bees in the hive. The workers are simply gone. The frames have unfinished honeycomb hanging from the top like patterned stalactites. The queen is dead. A lonely worker sits on a limb. The brood writhes hopelessly in its cells, but it won't last for long without food.

A plague spreads through the nation. A third of the food consumed in the country depends on bees to flower and bear fruit, and the bees are leaving. In six years, three million honeybee colonies hollow out and disappear into the wind. With every passing winter, out of three beehives in America, one goes silent.

The killer is still at large, but poisons and banes used in DIY pest control products have received a close look. A government official spoke of a possible "subtle interaction" between factors that decimate bees. The word "subtle" may be misused, since over 120 different pesticides have been found in bees, tree pollen and wax.

Growers of food are hoping for a miracle cure, while trying to prepare for a season without bees. New almond trees have been bred to pollinate themselves, while producing fruit that can be sold and eaten. Other fruits and other vegetables are being grown to do without help. Environmental groups are seeking a ban on neonicotinoid pesticides, which are thought to be the main substance that confuses the directional sense of a bee and makes it unable to return to the hive. The coming years will show whether these measures will be enough.

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