

Virus may cause bee colonies to collapse

The Boston Globe

By Juliet Eilperin, The Washington Post | September 10, 2007

Scientists Thursday identified a virus as one of the probable causes of the recent wave of honeybee colony collapses across the country.

The study, co-authored by researchers at Penn State University, Columbia University, the US Department of Agriculture, and several other institutions, suggests that the Israeli acute paralysis virus helps trigger the mysterious condition known as colony collapse disorder, which destroyed 23 percent of US beehives last winter. The paper was published Friday in the journal Science.

Beekeepers, scientists, and public officials have been searching for the cause of the disorder, which surfaced in 2004 and was formally recognized last year. Unlike other diseases that strike hives, the collapse disorder leaves a colony without most of its worker bees despite the presence of plentiful food, a queen, and other adult bees. It has devastated an industry that produces honey and pollinates lucrative crops such as almonds, oranges, and apples.

The team of scientists who authored the paper emphasized that they have begun to unlock the puzzle but have yet to determine exactly what causes a colony's abrupt decline. ■

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