

Bees In Alaska

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Mary Donaldson/KMXT

There is lots of buzz about bees these days. Some areas of the nation are worried that nature's little pollinators are dwindling, which affects crop production. Mary Donaldson investigates how bee populations in Alaska are doing.

Despite the occasional sting, bees have very important roles for pollinating plants and crops across the country, so a drop in their population can have quite an effect.

Janice Chumley, the integrated pest management technician for the University of Alaska's Cooperative Extension Services in Soldotna says honey bees, which are not native to Alaska, seem to be having difficulties.

(Chumley 2 :25s "…favorable weather conditions.")

I asked if she thought bee populations in state are declining, and she says as far as Alaska's native pollinators, there really isn't much of a change.

(Chumley 1 :28s "…thriving in that.")

Conditions haven't been very warm, seeing how many areas of the state, including Kodiak, saw snow showers as late as April. She also says people with bee hives may be experiencing larger problems besides weather changes.

(Chumley 3 :17s “…the way they do.”)

Colony collapse disorder is a mystery phenomenon where the worker bees in a colony disappear. The National Resource Defense Council says their absence leads to a ghost town colony. The drop in numbers could come from a number of unconfirmed causes, such as climate changes, pesticides, mites or poor nutrition.

Ed Marshall is the vice president for the Southcentral Alaska Beekeepers Association and says any disappearance of bees this summer in Alaska is because of weather and how the bee hives are cared for, not colony collapse disorder.

(Marshall 3 :28s “…try to find some.”)

Marshall cares for 10 bee hives.

In Alaska, the need for bees for agricultural purposes isn’t really present compared to the rest of the nation says Chumley. Across the U.S., fruits and veggies can't grow without honeybees, and the dying-off of these hard-working pollinators could put \$15 billion dollars worth of U.S. crops at risk, says the NRDC. The US Department of Agriculture says honey bees in Alaska are imported each year and are generally killed off when the winter months arrive, while new bees are then purchased again in the next season.

The USDA says there are 19 species of bees found in Alaska, compared to the 49 species found nationwide.

I’m Mary Donaldson.

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