

When bees disappear, will man soon follow?

Column: Shooting Dead Horses
Jean-Claude Gerard Koven

April 3, 2007

Last week I received an email from a friend reporting a sudden, devastating collapse in America's bee population. The message triggered an immediate unpleasant shiver through my body as I recalled the ominous quote attributed to Albert Einstein: "If the bee disappeared off the surface of the globe, then man would only have four years of life left. No more bees, no more pollination, no more plants, no more animals, no more man."

Being a bit skeptical, I assumed this was just another piece of alarmist misinformation finding its way onto Internet distribution lists. A few minutes' research not only confirmed the story, but made me realize that the problem is far from local. In official circles, the condition is called either Fall-Dwindle Disease or, more commonly, Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD).

The communication I received stated: "Honeybees are flying off in search of pollen and nectar and simply never returning to their colonies. During the final three months of 2006, a distressing number of honeybee colonies began to diminish from the United States, and beekeepers all over the country have reported unprecedented losses. According to scientists, the domesticated honeybee population has declined by about 50 percent in the last 50 years. Reports of similar losses to the honeybee population have been documented before in beekeeping literature, but are widely believed to have occurred at this scale previously only at a regional level. With outbreaks recorded as far back as 1896, this is regarded as the first national honeybee epidemic in U.S. history."

The topics grabbing headlines these days leave little room in the news for the plight of an insect. What we fail to appreciate is that without an abundance of bees to pollinate crops, the United States could lose as much as 30 percent of its food supply. According to Zac Browning, vice president of the American Beekeeping Federation, "Every third bite we consume in our diet is dependent on a honeybee to pollinate that food."

There is no doubt about what is happening — or its consequences if the situation is not rectified. What remains murky is the cause. According to Walter Haefeker, director of the German Beekeepers Association, CCD has four possible causes: the varroa mite, introduced from Asia; the widespread practice of spraying wildflowers with herbicides; the practice of monoculture (a single crop covering a large area); and the controversial yet growing use of genetic engineering in agriculture.

However, it is the thinking of one of the cell phone industry's former scientific hired guns that caught my attention. When George Carlo, M.D., the celebrated author of "Cell Phones: Invisible Hazards in the Wireless Age" and current chairman of the nonprofit Science and Public Policy Institute in Washington, D.C., weighs in with an opinion, we'd all be fools not to listen carefully.

On a recent conference call, Dr. Carlo laid the blame for the sudden demise (often within 72 hours) of entire bee colonies on the recent proliferation of electromagnetic waves (EMF). He

cited the startling statistic that, at present, there are some 2.5 billion cell phone users around the world. While this (plus the explosive growth of cell phone towers) used to be the major concern, the problem has been significantly exacerbated by the recent introduction of satellite radio. Imagine being closeted in a confined environment filled with chain smokers; it would be impossible for you to get a breath of clean air. It is becoming equally difficult for you to avoid the now-measurable damage from EMF exposure.

Dr. Carlo commented that the constant electromagnetic background noise seems to disrupt intercellular communication within individual bees, such that many of them cannot find their way back to the hive. His conclusions are confirmed by a recent study conducted by three departments of Panjab University (India), which has found that cell phone towers — the dominant source of electromagnetic radiation in the city of Chandigarh — could well be the cause behind the mysterious disappearance of butterflies, some insects (like bees), and birds.

Andrew Weil, M.D., author of "Spontaneous Healing and 8 Weeks to Optimum Health," fully agrees: "Electromagnetic pollution may be the most significant form of pollution human activity has produced in this century, all the more dangerous because it is invisible and insensible." In some countries, up to 10 percent of the population suffers from a serious EMF-induced condition that Dr. Carlo and others call membrane sensitivity syndrome. In a recent address to the Health, Social Services and Housing Sub-Panel in the United Kingdom, Carlo explained: "Originally, this type of condition was the result of high chemical exposures; we used to call it chemical sensitivity. Now we have identified the same type of condition in patients who are exposed to various types of electromagnetic radiation. It is a medical problem. People who have membrane sensitivity syndrome have internal bleeding. They can be in a room where somebody puts on a cell phone, and they will end up having an immediate reaction; they will go home and they will bleed and in their stool they will have blood. This condition is very debilitating. It prevents these people from being able to work; they cannot earn a living, they have difficult relationships with their children, their spouses give up on them. ... It is a very, very serious medical problem."

The bees are the modern-day counterpart of the canaries that miners used to carry with them as they descended into the mine shafts. If the birds died, it was an early warning of a buildup of toxic gases in the mine. When canaries die or bees disappear, we are being cautioned that we too are in immediate danger. It is time to listen to the message nature is telling us. Denial — the favorite ploy of those whose profits are being threatened — is no longer an option. As Arthur Schopenhauer said, "All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident."

I shudder to think of what will become of humankind if we linger too long in stage two: "no more bees, no more pollination, no more plants, no more animals, no more man."

— — —

Jean-Claude Gerard Koven is a writer and speaker based in Rancho Mirage, Calif. He is a featured weekly columnist for UPI's (United Press International) ReligionAndSpirituality.com and the author of "Going Deeper: How to Make Sense of Your Life When Your Life Makes No Sense," recipient of both the Allbooks Reviews editor's choice award and the USABookNews.com award for the best metaphysical book of the year. For more information, please visit: www.goingdeeper.org. © copyright 2007 Jean-Claude Gerard Koven