

Falling wild bee population study: Harvests threatened in the USA and Canada

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New research shows a sharp decline in wild bees in North America. This has serious consequences for agricultural production.

Fewer and fewer wild bees are ready to do unpaid work in the fields Photo: Boris Roessler / dpa

PARIS *afp* | According to a new study, the declining population of wild bees threatens the yield of fruit and vegetables in the USA and Canada to a considerable extent. The monetary value of pollination of important crops by wild bees in North America is, according to the study published in the British journal "Proceedings of the Royal Society B", at 1.5 billion dollars (1.28 billion euros). The authors warned of serious effects on food production.

The study, sponsored by the United States Department of Agriculture, involved scientists from various universities in the United States and Canada. For their analysis, they examined the dependence of seven crops that are central to North American agriculture on wild and honey bees. In total, the researchers collected samples from 131 farms.

Five of the plant species examined showed a direct connection between the decline in wild bee populations and a decline in production. The authors also found that wild bees play a much more important role in pollinating important crops in North America than previously thought.

In the United States, it had previously been assumed that honeybees were the most important pollinator insects. Unlike wild bees, honey bees are often rented from farmers and used directly in the fields for pollination.

Pollinator performance in the US: over \$ 1.5 billion

According to the study authors, the monetary value of pollination by wild bees in the United States is more than \$ 1.5 billion, compared to \$ 6.4 billion for honeybees. However, almond production alone accounts for \$ 4.2 billion in honeybees. In contrast, fertilization by wild bees plays a greater role in crops such as pumpkins, apples, sweet cherries, blueberries and

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watermelon.

To ensure pollination of their fields, study author Rachael Winfree from Rutgers University recommended that farmers retrofit their farms "so that wild bees can live there". This can be achieved by avoiding pesticides that are toxic to bees, the researcher AFP said.

According to the UN, 75 percent of the 115 most important crop plants worldwide are dependent on pollination by insects. This also includes important agricultural products such as coffee and cocoa.

Last year, a study of insect mortality caused a sensation, in which the authors predicted the global insect population would decline by a third by the end of the 21st century. The main reasons for the extinction of insect species are the use of pesticides and the loss of the natural habitat.

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