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The mystery of America's vanishing bees

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28th February, 2007

THE ARTICLE

The mystery of America's vanishing bees

The disappearance of millions of bees is worrying agriculturalists in 24 states across the USA. Honeybees are vanishing at an alarming rate across America. Their absence is beginning to threaten the production of crops and the livelihoods of farmers. It is a little-known fact that bees contribute around \$14bn to the U.S. economy as they go about their business of pollinating flowers. The unexplained vanishing act is likely to affect the lucrative harvest of avocados, almonds and kiwi fruits, as well as numerous other fruits and vegetables. This will result in higher prices for consumers. In some states, over half of the bee populations have vanished without trace. Some beekeepers have reported losses of more than 70 per cent of their bee stocks. The phenomenon has baffled scientists, who are now as busy as bees to come up with an explanation.

One U.S. beekeeper is at a loss to explain what has happened to his bees. David Bradshaw, 50, from California, told the New York Times that he had never seen anything like it in all his years of beekeeping. He estimates that half of his 100 million bees have gone. He said he has known of bees to disappear before but that this is America's first national bee crisis. Experts have put forward several theories including a cold snap felling swarms of bees, or bee viruses resulting in what scientists are calling a "colony collapse disorder". A further possibility is that the bees are stressed out. With the factory-like, intensive farming methods used in the USA, bees are put to work much more often than nature intended. This may have lowered their immunity to viruses and harmed the ability of queen bees to produce eggs.

WARM-UPS

1. I'M A BEE: You are a bee. Buzz around the classroom and talk to your fellow "bees" about your life. What flowers do you like? What do you worry about? What do you think of humans?

2. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words from the article are most interesting and which are most boring.

bees / disappearances / crops / farmers / vanishing acts / almonds / prices / beekeepers / crises / cold snaps / viruses / intensive farming / stress / eggs

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

3. ANIMAL SIMILIES: With your partner(s), talk about the times in your life you are, or have been:

- as busy as a bee
- as stubborn as a mule
- as sly as a fox
- as blind as a bat
- as strong as an ox
- as wise as an owl
- as brave as a lion
- as proud as a peacock

4. BEELINES: Look at these newspaper headlines. Talk about them with your partner. What is the story behind them? Change partners and share stories.

- Bees contribute \$14 billion to U.S. economy
- Bees discovered to be more intelligent than humans
- Disappearing bees spell the end of the world as we know it
- Bees found to be excellent pets
- Bees to be used in new warfare tactics
- Beekeeping – the world's most rewarding job
- Basketball-sized bees swarming towards world's major cities

5. BEE RANKING: Look at the table. With your partner(s), rank the people/animals according to who likes bees most. Change partners and compare rankings.

- flowers
- bee-eaters
- small children
- farmers
- gardeners
- beekeepers

6. BEES: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with bees. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- a. Magicians have replaced rabbits with bees in their magic shows. T / F
- b. Bees contribute \$14 billion to the U.S. economy. T / F
- c. The price of avocados, almonds and kiwi fruit may rise in America. T / F
- d. Over 70 percent of bees have disappeared in some U.S. states. T / F
- e. One beekeeper has lost 50 million bees. T / F
- f. America is suffering its first national bee crisis in four decades. T / F
- g. A heat wave is being blamed for the disappearing bees. T / F
- h. Some scientists say U.S. bees are overworked and stressed out. T / F

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|----------------|---------------|
| a. vanishing | bewildered |
| b. absence | profitable |
| c. lucrative | sign |
| d. trace | had in mind |
| e. baffled | disaster |
| f. estimates | disappearing |
| g. crisis | striking down |
| h. put forward | dearth |
| i. felling | propose |
| j. intended | reckons |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| a. Honeybees are vanishing at | calling a "colony collapse disorder" |
| b. It is a little- | baffled scientists |
| c. vanished | an alarming rate |
| d. The phenomenon has | his years |
| e. as busy as bees to come | without trace |
| f. One U.S. beekeeper is at a | forward several theories |
| g. never seen anything like it in all | loss to explain what has happened |
| h. Experts have put | up with an explanation |
| i. resulting in what scientists are | their immunity to viruses |
| j. This may have lowered | known fact |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words into the gaps in the text.

The mystery of America's vanishing bees

The disappearance of millions of bees is worrying agriculturalists in 24 states across the USA. Honeybees are vanishing at an _____ rate across America. Their absence is beginning to threaten the production of crops and the _____ of farmers. It is a little-known fact that bees contribute around \$14bn to the U.S. economy as they go about their _____ of pollinating flowers. The unexplained vanishing act is _____ to affect the lucrative harvest of avocados, almonds and kiwi fruits, as well as numerous other fruits and vegetables. This will _____ in higher prices for consumers. In some states, over half of the bee populations have _____ without trace. Some beekeepers have reported losses of more than 70 per cent of their bee _____. The phenomenon has baffled scientists, who are now as busy as bees to _____ up with an explanation.

One U.S. beekeeper is at a _____ to explain what has happened to his bees. David Bradshaw, 50, from California, told the New York Times that he had never seen anything like it in all his years of beekeeping. He _____ that half of his 100 million bees have gone. He said he has known of bees to disappear before but that this is America's first national bee _____. Experts have put forward several theories including a cold snap felling _____ of bees, or bee viruses resulting in what scientists are calling a "colony collapse disorder". A _____ possibility is that the bees are stressed out. With the factory-like, _____ farming methods used in the USA, bees are put to work much more often than _____ intended. This may have lowered their immunity to viruses and harmed the _____ of queen bees to produce eggs.

result

vanished

alarming

come

business

stocks

likely

livelihoods

further

crisis

nature

estimates

ability

loss

intensive

swarms

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

The mystery of America's vanishing bees

The disappearance _____ bees is worrying agriculturalists in 24 states across the USA. Honeybees are vanishing at an alarming rate across America. Their absence is _____ the production of crops and the livelihoods of farmers. It is _____ that bees contribute around \$14bn to the U.S. economy as they go about their business of pollinating flowers. The unexplained vanishing act is _____ the lucrative harvest of avocados, almonds and kiwi fruits, as well as numerous other fruits and vegetables. This will result in higher prices for consumers. In some states, over half of the bee populations have _____. Some beekeepers have reported losses of more than 70 per cent of their bee stocks. The phenomenon has baffled scientists, who are now as busy as bees _____ an explanation.

One U.S. beekeeper _____ explain what has happened to his bees. David Bradshaw, 50, from California, told the New York Times that he had never seen anything like _____ beekeeping. He estimates that half of his 100 million bees have gone. He said he has known of bees to disappear before but that this is America's _____. Experts have put forward several theories including _____ swarms of bees, or bee viruses resulting in what scientists are calling a "_____". A further possibility is that the bees are stressed out. With the factory-like, intensive farming methods used in the USA, bees _____ more often than nature intended. This may have lowered their immunity to viruses and harmed _____ bees to produce eggs.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'honey' and 'bee'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "BEES" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about bees, honey and being busy.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• millions• rate• fact• flowers• trace• busy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• loss• years• first• calling• intensive• eggs
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DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a) What did you think when you read the headline?
- b) What do you think is behind the mystery?
- c) How valuable do you think bees are to nature?
- d) Are there any animals that are busier than bees?
- e) What kind of economic damage do you think the disappearance of bees could do?
- f) What do you think life is like as a bee?
- g) What would happen to the world if all bees vanished?
- h) Do you think the bee mystery is a warning about global warming?
- i) What do you think bees would like to say to humans?
- j) What do you think would cause bigger damage to the planet, the disappearance of bees or ants?



STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a) Did you like reading this article?
- b) When was the last time you were at a loss?
- c) What do you think the job of a beekeeper is like?
- d) How do you think it's possible for millions, perhaps billions, of bees to disappear without trace?
- e) How do you think Americans are reacting to their first national bee crisis?
- f) Do you think bees can become stressed out by visiting too many flowers?
- g) Do you work harder than nature intended you to?
- h) What do you think of intensive farming techniques?
- i) What question would you like to ask a bee?
- j) Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a) What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b) Was there a question you didn't like?
- c) Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d) What did you like talking about?
- e) Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS:

You are the one of bee leaders behind the mystery of the vanishing bees. With your fellow bee leaders, answer these questions:

- a) Why did you decide to disappear from 24 American states?
- b) Where did you go?
- c) How long will you stay in hiding?
- d) What do you want from the humans?
- e) What will you do if you do not get what you want?
- f) Are you in contact with any other animal or insect populations?
- g) What are your fears about the future of the planet?

Change partners and share your answers.

Return to your original partners. Decide on five things you want the humans to do. If they do not do these things, all of the world's bees will go into hiding. Write your demands and reasons below:

Demands	Reasons
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

Role play a discussion between the chief bee negotiator (the bees will not return unless all demands are met) and the President of the United States (will the world believe you are negotiating with bees?).

Change partners and compare stories on how your negotiations went.

LANGUAGE

CORRECT WORD: Put the correct words from a-d below in the article.

The mystery of America's vanishing bees

The disappearance of millions of bees is (1) ____ agriculturalists in 24 states across the USA. Honeybees are vanishing at an (2) ____ rate across America. Their absence is beginning to threaten the production of crops and the livelihoods of farmers. It is a little-(3) ____ fact that bees contribute around \$14bn to the U.S. economy as they go (4) ____ their business of pollinating flowers. The unexplained vanishing act is likely to affect the lucrative harvest of avocados, almonds and kiwi fruits, as well as numerous other fruits and vegetables. This will result (5) ____ higher prices for consumers. In some states, over half of the bee populations have vanished without trace. Some beekeepers have reported losses of more than 70 per cent of their bee stocks. The phenomenon has baffled scientists, who are now as busy as bees to come (6) ____ with an explanation.

One U.S. beekeeper is (7) ____ a loss to explain what has happened to his bees. David Bradshaw, 50, from California, told the New York Times that he had never seen anything like it in (8) ____ his years of beekeeping. He estimates that half of his 100 million bees have gone. He said he has known of bees to disappear before but that this is America's first national bee crisis. Experts have put (9) ____ several theories including a cold snap felling swarms of bees, or bee viruses resulting in (10) ____ scientists are calling a "colony collapse disorder". A further possibility is that the bees are stressed out. With the factory-like, intensive farming methods used in the USA, bees are (11) ____ to work much more often than nature (12) _____. This may have lowered their immunity to viruses and harmed the ability of queen bees to produce eggs.

- | | | | | |
|-----|----------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------|
| 1. | (a) worrying | (b) worried | (c) worry | (d) worries |
| 2. | (a) alarms | (b) alarm bells | (c) alarm | (d) alarming |
| 3. | (a) knows | (b) know | (c) known | (d) knowing |
| 4. | (a) round | (b) of | (c) about | (d) above |
| 5. | (a) in | (b) on | (c) of | (d) with |
| 6. | (a) up | (b) on | (c) in | (d) down |
| 7. | (a) of | (b) it | (c) out | (d) at |
| 8. | (a) throughout | (b) all | (c) whole | (d) very |
| 9. | (a) reverse | (b) forward | (c) backward | (d) sideways |
| 10. | (a) who | (b) when | (c) why | (d) what |
| 11. | (a) busy | (b) overtime | (c) put | (d) working |
| 12. | (a) intend | (b) intending | (c) intention | (d) intended |

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information about honeybees. Talk about what you discover with your partner(s) in the next lesson.

3. BEE POSTER: Make a poster showing the world's different kinds of bees. Show your poster to your class in the next lesson. Vote on the best one

4. MAGAZINE ARTICLE: Write a magazine article about the impact on the natural world of all bees disappearing. Read what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Which article was best and why?

5. LETTER: Write a letter to a bee. Tell him/her what you think of his/her role and activities in nature. Give him three pieces of advice. Ask him three questions. Read your letter to your partner(s) in your next lesson. Your partner(s) will answer your questions.

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. F b. T c. T d. T e. T f. F g. F h. T

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|----------------|---------------|
| a. vanishing | disappearing |
| b. absence | dearth |
| c. lucrative | profitable |
| d. trace | sign |
| e. baffled | bewildered |
| f. estimates | reckons |
| g. crisis | disaster |
| h. put forward | propose |
| i. felling | striking down |
| j. intended | had in mind |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| a. Honeybees are vanishing at | an alarming rate |
| b. It is a little- | known fact |
| c. vanished | without trace |
| d. The phenomenon has | baffled scientists |
| e. as busy as bees to come | up with an explanation |
| f. One U.S. beekeeper is at a | loss to explain what has happened |
| g. never seen anything like it in all | his years |
| h. Experts have put | forward several theories |
| i. resulting in what scientists are | calling a "colony collapse disorder" |
| j. This may have lowered | their immunity to viruses |

GAP FILL:

The mystery of America's vanishing bees

The disappearance of millions of bees is worrying agriculturalists in 24 states across the USA. Honeybees are vanishing at an **alarming** rate across America. Their absence is beginning to threaten the production of crops and the **livelihoods** of farmers. It is a little-known fact that bees contribute around \$14bn to the U.S. economy as they go about their **business** of pollinating flowers. The unexplained vanishing act is **likely** to affect the lucrative harvest of avocados, almonds and kiwi fruits, as well as numerous other fruits and vegetables. This will **result** in higher prices for consumers. In some states, over half of the bee populations have **vanished** without trace. Some beekeepers have reported losses of more than 70 per cent of their bee **stocks**. The phenomenon has baffled scientists, who are now as busy as bees to **come** up with an explanation.

One U.S. beekeeper is at a **loss** to explain what has happened to his bees. David Bradshaw, 50, from California, told the New York Times that he had never seen anything like it in all his years of beekeeping. He **estimates** that half of his 100 million bees have gone. He said he has known of bees to disappear before but that this is America's first national bee **crisis**. Experts have put forward several theories including a cold snap felling **swarms** of bees, or bee viruses resulting in what scientists are calling a "colony collapse disorder". A **further** possibility is that the bees are stressed out. With the factory-like, **intensive** farming methods used in the USA, bees are put to work much more often than **nature** intended. This may have lowered their immunity to viruses and harmed the **ability** of queen bees to produce eggs.

LANGUAGE WORK

- 1 - a 2 - d 3 - c 4 - c 5 - a 6 - a 7 - d 8 - b 9 - b 10 - d 11 - c 12 - d