

A HONEY OF A MYSTERY

Beekeepers around the United States are puzzling over a big mystery:

Beehives buzzing with activity one day are nearly completely empty when next inspected.

Normally when something goes wrong, beekeepers find piles of dead bees and other clues, but with what scientists have named Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD), beekeepers find no dead bees – just honey, eggs, larvae and pupae left behind.

This is a big deal for humans, too. Besides producing honey, honeybees pollinate about 90 different crops such as almonds, blueberries and apples. One of every three or four bites of food we eat is the result of honeybee activity.

The good news? Some researchers think tiny microphones inserted into beehives can help solve this mystery. The buzz of bees that are sick or stressed sounds different from that of healthy bees. Patterns in the recordings might help identify CCD. Some possible culprits: a new honeybee disease or parasite and exposure to chemical pesticides. —Susan M. Brackney

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VALUABLE VOMIT

You read that headline right. Petrified whale vomit, or ambergris, is valuable. Once an ingredient in fine perfumes, the rare stuff is also used as a medicine. Some people even eat it. ¶ Sperm whales are the only whales that produce ambergris. At first, the barf is a stinky mess. But after years of floating atop the ocean, the blob hardens and becomes smooth and pleasant-smelling (believe it or not). ¶ Last year, beachcombers in Australia came across a 32-pound chunk, but it's more typical to find a small lump. Owning or selling ambergris is now illegal because sperm whales are an endangered species. Perfume manufacturers now use synthetic ambergris instead of the real thing. —Kate Wagner

PRAIRIE DOGS, BALD EAGLES, GRAY WOLVES –

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