



The vanishing of the bees

Directors: George Langworthy & Maryam Henein
Country: USA
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A review by Georgina Hutchinson for the *The Epoch Times*:

Telling the worrying story of the vanishing honeybees, this is a well-intentioned, serious wake-up call documentary. It tugs at the heart strings and is sure to leave the audience eager to grow their own vegetables and rally in the streets in the name of the bees. As the film follows the concerns of various bee keepers, activists, and farmers, it becomes clear there is no simple explanation for the disturbing decrease in the bee population known as CCD (Colony Collapse Disorder). The implications of a world without bees is horrifying. Bees are the principle pollinators of the bulk of the fruits and vegetables we eat. Therefore, the decline in their population spells dire consequences for our own.

As the film builds a convincing case for the probable cause of the bee's demise, the fingers point at the corporate companies profiting from the industrialization of agriculture. As Pollan suggests, modern farming methods have resulted in monoculture farming, widespread specialization in single crops. This in turn requires much intervention to keep pests at bay in the form of pesticides, chemicals put into the environment as part of our food production processes. These chemicals are affecting the bees immune and nervous systems, which points to the next worrying question, what effect are they having on other organisms, including us as the consumers?

The film is most poignant when some of the particularly informed interviewees are on camera, namely writer and academic Michael Pollan, articulate Florida beekeeper Dave Mendes, his friend and fellow beekeeper David Mackenberg, and Dr. Maryann Frazier of Penn State University who has been testing the level of pesticides in bees.

Slightly rambling and packing in a lot of surplus information, the film distracts at times from the main thrust of the issue (one interviewee talks about the divine feminine represented by the bee and it just seems out of place here). Flitting between voice-over (provided by an appropriately earnest sounding Ellen Page), some slightly questionable animation and plenty of interviews, the film lacks a coherent style but succeeds 100% with its essential message.

The documentary offers a positive slant on the crisis with several individuals advocating the importance of holistic bee keeping and organic farming as the way forward. Dave Mendes and David Mackenberg also take a trip to France where 10 years earlier the same problem occurred. The film shows footage of French beekeepers protesting in the streets outside the chemical manufacturers and succeeded in the banning of various pesticides on certain crops. In the United States where beekeeping is a huge industrialized operation, change is not so easy to come by. The main problem the film suggests is a lack of research into the effects of the chemicals and a failing in the government-corporate relationship. The Environmental Protection Agency does not do independent studies and therefore the manufacturers own toxicologists say the chemicals are fine, which simply gets a nod from government. The beekeepers however, have to face the sad reality. In an attempt to avoid CCD, many are trying to keep their bees as far as possible from the crops where they know the pesticides are used.

The message is clear—honeybees are essential to our environment and therefore the effects are only going to grow more apparent if the crisis afflicting them is not taken seriously. Filmmakers George Lanworthy and Maryam Henein have created a satisfying, campaigning documentary that is undeniably educational and emotionally stirring, though perhaps lacks a distinct cinematic flavor.

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