



Australia Killing Million of its Bees

Why in News?

Australian authorities have killed millions of honeybees over the past two weeks in an effort to stop a potentially catastrophic parasite plague named **Varroa mite**.

- The decision to kill honeybees could adversely impact the growth of several crops including almonds, macadamia nuts, and blueberries that are dependent on hives for pollination.
- Bees are some of the most important pollinators, ensuring food and food security, sustainable agriculture, and biodiversity.

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Understanding the life cycle of the Varroa mite

1

The queen is the largest in the beehive. She lays up to 2,000 eggs per day in the brood cells.

2

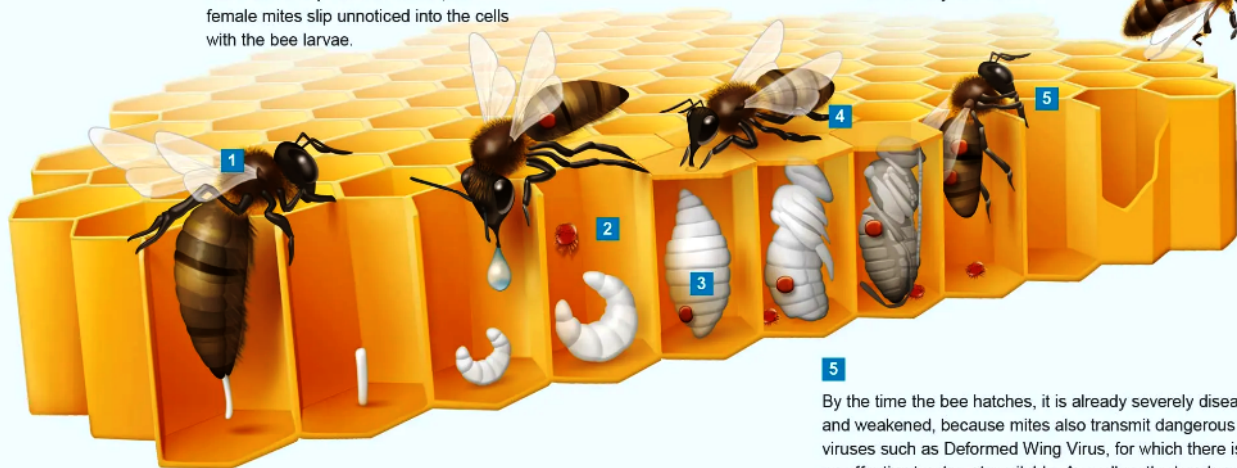
Worker bees often carry Varroa mites with them into the hive. Despite being deaf and blind, these mites can find their ways to the brood chambers thanks to their olfactory sense and numerous fine sensory hairs on the legs. Shortly before the workers cap the brood cells, the female mites slip unnoticed into the cells with the bee larvae.

3

A few days later, the mites lay the first eggs. The first to hatch is always a male. It is followed by up to five more eggs from which female mites hatch.

4

To feed its offspring, the mother mite pierces a feeding hole in the bee pupa which has developed in the meantime. Before the bee hatches, the mites mate again – during the bee season, the Varroa population in a hive can double every four weeks.



5

By the time the bee hatches, it is already severely diseased and weakened, because mites also transmit dangerous viruses such as Deformed Wing Virus, for which there is still no effective treatment available. As well as the bee brood, Varroa can also infest adult bees.

What is Varroa Mite?

- Its **parasitic insect infects and feeds on honeybees**, often known as the varroa destructor. The small pests, which are reddish-brown in colour, have been **capable of eradicating entire colonies of honeybees**.
- They frequently circulate amongst bees as well as through beekeeping supplies like removed combs.
- Although Varroa mites can feed and live on adult honey bees, they primarily feed and reproduce

on larvae and pupae in developing brood, causing malformation and weakening as well as virus transmission.

- As the mite population in bee colonies grows, the symptoms become more severe. In general, heavy infestations result in crippled bees, impaired flight performance, a lower rate of return to the colony after foraging, and reduced colony productivity.

Source: IE

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