

# The Register-Guard

NEWS NEWS

AGRICULTURE

## A bee-haven town

Celebrants cheer Eugene as ‘America’s most bee-friendly city’

MULTIMEDIA PHOTO

BY DIANE DIETZ

*The Register-Guard*

JUNE 1, 2014

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Eugene Mayor Kitty Piercy and a trio of city councilors stood around with wagging bee antennae on their heads Saturday and celebrated Eugene as “America’s most bee-friendly city.”

That’s because the council in February banned the use of neonicotinoids — a pesticide implicated in massive bee die-offs — from use on city property.

Dozens of celebrants, including scores of bee-loving and behaving children, filled

Washington Park for the so-called Bee-Fest organized by the Eugene-based Beyond Toxics group.

The ban was a modest win for the environment, but environmental scientist Sarah France, who sat on the lawn with her two children, said that she'd take it.

"There aren't that many that turn around so quickly and give you a happy feeling," she said. "It keeps you from getting too depressed about all of the other issues."

Her 5-year-old daughter, Ava Beck, was tickled, too.

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"I like bees," she said, "because they collect nectar from flowers. They also make honey, and that's another reason I like them."

Farmers, activists and others have worried about bees because the number of healthy commercial colonies the government counts each year has fallen off at a troubling rate.

A May report found colonies fell by 23 percent through last winter. It's a bit better than the previous winter, when 31 percent of colonies collapsed.

Honeybees are needed to pollinate plants that grow one-quarter of food consumed in the United States. That includes apples, plums, peaches and almonds.

"We wouldn't be eating things like blueberries and apples and beans and squash, and the list goes on and on," Beyond Toxics Executive Director Lisa Arkin told the assembled celebrants on Saturday, including grown women and children in bee girl costumes.

"We're here today to celebrate bees of all kinds — bumblebees, honeybees, wood bees, burrowing bees," Arkin said.

Celebrate they did: They drank hibiscus tea, ate gluten-free pickles and got blissed out on coconut ice cream.

They tasted honey from the Healthy Bees — Healthy Gardens program, which places hives on city blocks where homeowners swear off the use of pesticides.

Volunteer beekeeper Jen Hornaday has placed 15 hives so far, including on Washington, Madison, Adams and Grant streets near the city core.

The festivalgoers glued cutout flowers, tied sort-of-like bee balloons and painted their faces. A tiny painted bumblebee looped around the left eye of 3-year-old bee girl Olivia Harris.

Perhaps it was the antennae on their heads, but the politicians were uncharacteristically brief and poetic.

“Oh, we’re just all abuzz about this,” said Piercy, after accepting an award on behalf of the city from Beyond Toxics.

City Counselor Mike Clark made a mental tour of his garden.

“I have asparagus, dill, grapes, artichokes, oregano, basil, tomatoes, lima beans, broccoli, cucumbers, peas, raspberries and green beans and carrots,” he said.

Councilor George Brown stood up for an unheralded species.

“The ban on neonics is for all pollinators, not just bees,” he said, “although bees are super-important. It’s also: butterflies won’t be killed. They’re pollinators, too.”

Brown promised to nudge the city toward creating more city parks that are entirely pesticide free. So far, there are nine, and most of those are small.

The enthusiasm was less expansive, but Beyond Toxics also celebrated the Legislature’s passage, also in February, of the Save Oregon’s Pollinators Act.

The bill as it was originally introduced would have allowed the use of neonicotinoids — often called neonics — only by licensed commercial applicators. Consumer products such as Bayer Advanced All-in-One Rose & Flower Care and Ortho Bug B Gon for Lawns would have been taken off the shelves of hardware and home improvement stores.

“Most homeowners do not know (the importance of) reading the label, do not understand the label — and they don’t have the tools to measure how much they’re using,” Arkin said.

“Hey, it’s on the shelf; it must be safe. I can pay \$5.99. It’s on sale. I can get two for one. They assume the government has regulated its use,” she said.

Lawmakers, however, passed a weaker version that required commercial operators to take a course on pollinator health. It also required creation of a governor-appointed task force to study the pesticides and report back to the Legislature in October.

Gov. John Kitzhaber appointed the 10-member task force last week. It’s scheduled to begin meeting in June. “So much of Oregon’s natural landscapes and agricultural lands rely on bees and other pollinators,” Kitzhaber said in a prepared statement.

The state was spurred to action by a pair of June 2013 incidents in Wilsonville and Hillsboro in which tens of thousands of dead bees littered parking lots — in the wake of neonic treatments to nearby trees.

Chemical companies say it’s most likely mites that are killing the bees nationally; environmentalists say it’s the chemicals. Research is suggesting it’s a combination. The neonics weaken the bees’ immune systems so they can’t survive mite bites.

Neonics persist in the soils for as long as seven years, Arkin said. Plants take up the chemical and bees consume it with the flowers’ nectar.

“It’s taken by the bees to the hive and little by little over time that season it poisons the brood and then kills the hive,” Arkin said. “(Neonics) are so persistent and so systemic, there is no safe use of a neonic ever. Anywhere.”

Farm states are starting to take action. The Minnesota Legislature in recent weeks created a rapid response team of scientists to pin down the cause of bee die offs. Farmers who misapply pesticides will face stiff fines; farmers who lose bees will be compensated.

Eugene’s steps are tiny.

The city won’t spray parks; but homeowners are free to douse properties all around the parks. Eugene is apparently alone in the nation in adopting a ban.

“It’s a win,” Arkin said. “There’s so few times that we can say we have a definitive win — even though it’s small and even though it’s just one city. We can celebrate it.”

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## BEELINE

How bees are getting protection in Oregon

2006: Reports of large-scale honeybee losses emerge; called colony collapse disorder

February 2013: Eugene City Council votes to allow homeowners to keep up to three honeybee hives on small lots

June 2013: 50,000 bumblebees die in a Wilsonville Target store parking lot after trees are sprayed with pesticide containing neonicotinoids

June 2013: Hundreds of bees die in Hillsboro

June 2013: Department of Agriculture restricts the use of 18 pesticides related to bee kills

December 2013: Ag department restrictions expire

February 2014: Oregon Legislature passes a bill that requires a) licensed pesticide applicators to learn about pollinator health and b) the creation of a task force on protecting bees

February 2014: Eugene City Council bans the use of pesticides in city parks of the types implicated in bee kills

May 2014: USDA reports honey bee colony loss of 23 percent over the 2013-14 winter; follows a 31 percent loss the previous winter; a 19 percent annual loss is considered normal

May 2014: Gov. John Kitzhaber appoints a 10-member Task Force on Pollinator Health

October 2014: Task Force report on pollinator health due

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“*I like lady bugs. They're red. Bees are yellow. They get honey in the honey comb.*”  
*Olivia Harris, bee aficionado*

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## Comments

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**Jen Phillips** · a month ago

"homeowners are free to dowse properties all around the parks"

Divine typo, R-G. Really top-notch.

1 ^ | v · Share ›



**B\_Carfree** · a month ago

Bee friendly? Hardly. With approximately 50% of all hives dying off annually from CCD, a limit of three hives guarantees that a significant percentage of the people who try to keep bees in Eugene will not have any hives survive the winter. If they replace them from commercial sources, they increase the risk of bringing in diseases that will kill off other hives.

^ | v · Share ›



**Xavier\_Malcolm** · a month ago

Are there pickles that aren't gluten-free?

Why does the "reporter" call Mike Clark a "Counselor" but George Brown a "Councilor"?

4 ^ | v · Share ›



**Close\_to\_the\_Edge** → Xavier\_Malcolm · a month ago

Yeah, and they said a "trio" of councilors, who's the third councilor?

1 ^ | v · Share ›



**Guest** → Xavier\_Malcolm · a month ago

One grows and murders his own vegetables, a procedure that costs him more in time and materials, and is of little nutritional improvement to the organic varieties found in his ward's store venues. The other IS a store venue in his ward.

^ | v · Share ›



**Theodore Cheeze** · a month ago

How about idiots like the person down the road from me that has 118 hives on their 2.3 acre property. There are no large farms, orchards, or large vegetable farms anywhere nearby. Just 1000's of acres of timber land with the occasional patch of scotch broom, blackberries, and occasional small family vegetable garden. This person complains that the hives die off every year, but the following year they just add more hives and wonders why honey production is not increasing.

Then roughly 15 miles to the west you have another person that wants to increase peach and apple orchard production so they have been placing a hive at every tree trunk in the orchard. Then they wonder why the bees are dying and they are getting even less fruit then before.

Now if you plant a vegetable garden somewhere in between these two idiots all that happens is enormous swarms of honey bees descend on your garden that strip any available pollen from the plants. They usually arrive and start stripping the pollen as soon as the first grain of pollen appears on the anthers. They will even take pollen from the stamens, and I have watched them strip sweet corn pollen from the silk.

However, there has been a rather odd, but positive side effect where the local area scotch broom is not producing seed as it normally does and is actually starting to die back.

This is the same mentality that is creating problems with chemicals also. For instance they read on a label to use one ounce of a product in one gallon of water, then think to themselves I'll use five ounces to the gallon just to make sure it works the first time. Then apply ten times the suggested volume of mixed product. If it says 10 gallons of mixed product to the acre they use a 100 gallons instead.

It's really sad they are now applying that same overkill thinking to living organisms.

4 ^ | v • Share ›



**Outsider77** • a month ago

It probably escaped notice, but throughout this story there is not one shred of objective evidence given that suggests that even one bee benefited from the ban on neonics. This is not to say that none were, but there is no science here just emotion.

3 ^ | v • Share ›



**scotty perey** → Outsider77 • a month ago

I have been working on the neonicotinoid thing myself, so I can comment a little on the current evidence as I understand it... there is a lot of evidence regarding at least \*some\* connection with CCD and neonicotinoids, but it is complex. When applied incorrectly, it is extremely deadly, as when those \*flowering\* Linden trees in Wilsonville were sprayed last Spring with Dinotefutrin and tens if not hundreds of bumblebees perished. But when used in accordance with the label, admittedly there is no absolute smoking gun that indicates that neonicotinoids \*alone\* are contributing to CCD. I am told, for instance, that in Australia where neonicotinoids are being used, there has been no marked effect in this regard.

Manufacturers of these chemicals, understandably, prefer to point in the direction of varroa mites as the culprit. The problem here is that varroa mites have been around long before CCD has manifested. What it is looking like currently is that there is a relationship by which the neonicotinoids are possibly contributing to the diminishing of the bees' immune system and therefore making them more \*susceptible\* to the mites. And there is another complicating factor as well, with regards to a study that just came from Harvard just last month that reports that these negative effects described here are more pronounced with the advent of cold winters:

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