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## UK scientists get £8m for research into bee decline

Scientists will use the funding to investigate the decline in the UK's honeybee population, numbers of which have fallen by 15-30% in the last two years

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**John Vidal**, environment editor  
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Honey bees are vital insect pollinators, responsible for the healthy development of many of the world's major food crops. Photograph: David Silverman/Getty Images

Leading scientists are to receive a substantial cash injection to help them investigate the decline of the British honeybee.

Up to £8m will be made available for research into bees by the [Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council \(BBSRC\)](#), the [Natural Environment Research Council \(NERC\)](#), the [Wellcome Trust](#) and the Scottish government. The new funding is in addition to the [£2m announced earlier this year by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs \(Defra\)](#) to help bee research. The funding increase marks a significant rise in government spending on bee health, which previously amounted to £1.2m annually in the UK, with the vast majority spent on bee inspectors.

[Bee numbers in the UK have fallen](#) 15-30% in the last two years, mirroring steep declines and empty hives witnessed in the US, mainland Europe and elsewhere. Honeybees are vital insect pollinators, responsible for the healthy development of many of the world's major food crops.

The decline in bee health has been linked to the varroa mite which attacks bee larva, poor weather in recent summers, and [agricultural chemicals](#) and air pollution. Last year [Germany banned a family of pesticides](#) blamed for the death of millions of honeybees. But the phenomenon is still poorly understood.

"We are facing a fundamental problem with the decline of bees and other pollinators. They have an absolutely crucial role in pollinating many of our important crops. Without effective pollination we will face higher food costs and potential shortages. This

programme will help us to understand why numbers have decreased and the steps we could take to reverse this," said Douglas Kell, BBSRC's chief executive.

"Our sincere hope is that the majority of these funds will be directed towards practical research into the problems and threats that honeybees face in this country," said Tim Lovett, the president of the [British Beekeepers' Association](#).

But some scientists expressed concern that much of the money would go to study pollinators like butterflies and beetles which are only marginally important to crop pollination in Britain. "It's welcome, but it will not necessarily go to bees, which are far and away the most important species," said one bee scientist, who asked to remain anonymous.

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