

Bee Protection

How to Reduce Bee Poisoning from Pesticides

Erik Johansen and Judy Wu-Smart

Latest review—March 2021

Substantial portions of this article are taken from How to Reduce Bee Poisoning from Pesticides (PNW 591), written by Louisa Hooven, Ramesh Sagili and Erik Johansen. The publication may be downloaded as a pdf or an app: catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/pnw591.

Pollinators are essential to Pacific Northwest agriculture

Commercially managed honey bees pollinate a variety of crops in the Pacific Northwest, including tree fruits, berries, cucurbits, and crops grown for seed. This activity is economically significant. Beekeepers from California and the Pacific Northwest together perform nearly half of the nation’s commercial pollination, valued at approximately \$18 billion (Calderone 2012).

While honey bees are the most economically important pollinators, other managed bees are important as well. For example, alfalfa seed production in the western United States is dependent on alfalfa leafcutting bees and alkali bees for pollination, and managed bumble bees are important for greenhouse tomato production and some covered row crops. Native wild (pollen) bees, including numerous species of bumble bees, mining bees, mason bees, sweat bees, leafcutting bees, and carpenter bees, are all prolific pollinators. The estimated annual value of crops pollinated by wild, native bees in the U.S. is \$3 billion or more (Losey and Vaughan, 2006, Chaplin-Kramer et. al. 2011). More than 1,600 species of bees are native to California, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington (Tepedino and Griswold 1995; U.S. Pollinating Insects Database 2013). The full value of their pollination services to increased crop production is substantial, even in the presence of honey bees (Garibaldi et al. 2013), but their sensitivity to pesticides has not been studied extensively.

Rules to protect bees

READ THE PESTICIDE LABEL. Specific precautionary statements designed to protect bees are usually found in the Environmental Hazards section of the pesticide label. Some pesticide labels may include a bee advisory box and a bee hazard icon to more clearly identify the pesticide’s potential hazard to bees. Review the entire label for precautionary and advisory statements. Key words to look for include “highly toxic to bees,” “toxic to bees,” and “residues.” Crop-specific precautions may also be listed on the label. Although these precautions are based on toxicity to honey bees, they are also relevant to other species of bees, with some exceptions as noted in How to Reduce Bee Poisoning from Pesticides (PNW 591).

Residual toxicity to bees varies greatly among pesticides, and can range from hours to a week or more. When using insecticides with extended residual toxicity (residues expected to cause at least 25 percent mortality more than 8 hours after application), it is imperative that applicators and growers carefully consider potential exposures to both wild and managed bees, and avoid applying pesticides to blooming plants (crops or weeds). Residual toxicity data for some active ingredients is available on the EPA Pollinator Protection web page at www.epa.gov/pollinator-protection.

Systemic pesticides and the off-target movement of pesticide residues can increase potential exposure risks to bees. Systemic insecticide and fungicide residues may be translocated to all parts of a treated plant, including in the pollen and nectar where foraging pollinators may become exposed. Systemic pesticide residue contaminates in soil and water may also be taken up by surrounding vegetation. Therefore, utilizing chemical options that are less likely to leach into water supplies or are not persistent in soil will reduce the likelihood of off-target movement and non-target effects. Examine labels for Environmental Hazard Statements regarding the Soil Partition Coefficient and Aerobic Soil Metabolism Half-Life Phases as indicators of leeching and persistence potential.

Soil Partition Coefficient Phases	Specific Label Language	Leaching Potential
Kd less than 15	“high potential for reaching surface water via runoff”	Lower, possible surface water concerns
Kd between 15-300	“a medium potential for reaching both surface water and aquatic sediment via runoff”	Medium
Kd greater than 300	“high potential for reaching aquatic sediment via runoff”	High, possible ground water concerns

Aerobic Soil Metabolism Half-Life Phases	Specific Label Language	Persistence Potential
t1/2 less than 8 days	“several days after application”	Lower
t1/2 between 8 and 30 days	“several weeks after application”	Medium
t1/2 greater than 30 days	“several months or more after application”	High

The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is currently revising the risk assessment data requirements and process for pollinators, and it is expected that the precautionary statements on the labels of newly registered pesticides will be based on the results of these risk assessments. Potential chronic hazards to honey bees, and other pollinating insects, and the resulting label language will be assessed by the EPA on a case-by-case basis. The EPA is in the process of developing chronic toxicity label statements for pollinator protection. Refer to the EPA Pollinator Protection web page for additional information.

State rules to protect pollinators

The state agriculture departments in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho are the most reliable sources of current rules intended to reduce the hazard of pesticide applications to bees. For more information, call the number listed for your state under “Investigating and documenting a suspected bee poisoning incident.”

Oregon:

- ◆ Apiary Registration: www.oregon.gov/ODA/programs/IPP/InsectsSpiders/Pages/BeesApiaries.aspx
- ◆ Pollinator Issues web page: www.oregon.gov/ODA/programs/Pesticides/Pages/PollinatorIssues.aspx

Washington:

- ◆ Apiary Registration: agr.wa.gov/PlantsInsects/Apiary/
- ◆ General Pesticide Rules regarding Pollinator Protection (WAC 16-228-1220(1), WAC 16-228-1262 thru 1266): agr.wa.gov/Lawsrules/
- ◆ Managed Pollinator Protection Plan (MP3): agr.wa.gov/FP/Pubs/docs/101-681ManagedPollinatorProtectionPlan.pdf
- ◆ MP3 for Alfalfa Seed Production: s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2168/2017/10/alfalfa-seed-mp3.pdf

Idaho:

- ◆ Apiary Registration: agri.idaho.gov/main/plants/bees-apiary-inspection/
- ◆ Idaho Administrative Code, Pesticide and Chemigation Use and Application Rules: adminrules.idaho.gov/rules/current/02/0303.pdf

Investigating and documenting a suspected bee poisoning incident

If you have a question or concern regarding a suspected bee poisoning incident, contact your state agriculture department or, your county agricultural commissioner. Provide photos or video of the incident, together with notes describing the previous health of the colony, prevailing wind, EPA registration number (from the pesticide label) name of the suspected pesticide, how you believe the bees may have been exposed, pesticide treatments you have applied to the hives, and other pertinent details. Preserving at least 2 ounces of adult bees, brood, pollen, honey, nectar, or wax by immediately freezing in clearly labeled, clean containers may be helpful if the incident is later determined to warrant laboratory analysis.

In the event of enforcement action, some states will need to collect their own samples. Do not disturb the hives or site until the representative from your state lead office listed below has finished collecting information.

Oregon Department of Agriculture

Pesticide Division

Email: pestx@oda.state.or.us

Phone: 503-986-4635

Process for Investigating Pesticide Complaints: www.oregon.gov/ODA/programs/Pesticides/Pages/PesticideComplaints.aspx

Washington State Department of Agriculture

Pesticide Management Division

Email: pcompliance@agr.wa.gov

Phone: 360-902-2040 or 877-301-4555 (toll free)

Process for Investigating Pesticide Complaints: agr.wa.gov/PestFert/Pesticides/docs/566-PesticideComplaintInvestigationProcess.pdf

Idaho State Department of Agriculture

Agricultural Resources Division

Email: pesticidecompliance@isda.idaho.gov

Phone: 208-332-8605

Process for Investigating Pesticide Complaints: agri.idaho.gov/main/56-2/pesticides/enforcement/enforcement-2/

Report the bee poisoning incident to the EPA

The EPA requires multiple reports from beekeepers to detect any potential patterns related to specific pesticides. You can also notify the pesticide company, which is required by law to report adverse effects to the EPA.

Report a bee poisoning incident to the EPA: www.epa.gov/pollinator-protection/report-bee-kills

Causes of bee poisoning in the Pacific Northwest

Highly toxic insecticides with residual toxicity longer than 8 hours are responsible for most of the bee poisoning incidents reported on the West Coast, primarily those in the following chemical families:

- ◆ Organophosphates (such as acephate, chlorpyrifos, diazinon, dimethoate, malathion, and methamidophos)
- ◆ N-methyl carbamates (such as carbaryl)
- ◆ Systemic neonicotinoids (such as clothianidin, dinotefuran, imidacloprid, and thiamethoxam)
- ◆ Pyrethroids (such as cyfluthrin, deltamethrin, and lambda-cyhalothrin)

Some pyrethroids (such as esfenvalerate and permethrin) are repellent to bees when used under arid conditions prevalent in eastern Oregon, eastern Washington, and Idaho. Repellency reduces the potential for bee poisoning from these insecticides under arid conditions, but they are likely to pose a hazard to bees when used in humid areas.

Most bee poisoning incidents occur when:

- ◆ Beekeepers and growers do not adequately communicate.
- ◆ Insecticides are applied when bees are foraging.
- ◆ Insecticides are applied to bee-pollinated crops during bloom.
- ◆ Insecticides are applied to blooming weeds in orchards or field margins.
- ◆ Insecticides drift onto blooming plants adjacent to the target crop.
- ◆ Bees collect insecticide-contaminated pollen (such as corn), nectar (such as cotton or mint), or other materials from treated crops that do not require bee pollination.
- ◆ Bees collect insecticide-contaminated nectar from plants treated with systemic pesticides.
- ◆ Bees collect insecticide-contaminated nesting materials, such as leaf pieces collected by alfalfa leafcutting bees.
- ◆ Bees collect insecticide-contaminated water (from drip tape or chemigation, for example).

Pesticide poisoning isn't always obvious and may be confused with other factors. Delayed and chronic effects, such as poor brood development, are difficult to link to specific pesticides, but are possible when stored pollen, nectar, or wax comb become contaminated with pesticides. Severely weakened or queenless colonies may not survive the winter.

Poisonous plants such as California buckeye (*Aesculus californica*), death camas (*Toxicoscordion venenosum*), cornlily (*Veratrum viride*), and spotted locoweed (*Astragalus lentiginosus*) can injure and occasionally kill bee colonies. Viral paralysis disease, starvation, winter kill, and chilled brood can cause symptoms that may be confused with bee poisoning. Beekeepers may request a laboratory analysis of dead bees to determine if pesticides were responsible for an incident. State agriculture departments in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho investigate suspected bee poisoning incidents.

Signs and symptoms of bee poisoning

Honey bees

- ◆ Excessive numbers of dead and dying honey bees in front of the hives
- ◆ Increased defensiveness (most insecticides)
- ◆ Lack of foraging bees on a normally attractive blooming crop (most insecticides)
- ◆ Stupor, paralysis, and abnormal jerky, wobbly, or rapid movements; spinning on the back (organophosphates and neonicotinoids)
- ◆ Forager disorientation and reduced foraging efficiency (neonicotinoids)
- ◆ Immobile, lethargic bees unable to leave flowers (many insecticides)
- ◆ Regurgitation of honey stomach contents and tongue extension (organophosphates and pyrethroids)
- ◆ Performance of abnormal communication dances, fighting or confusion at the hive entrance (organophosphates)
- ◆ The appearance of “crawlers” (bees unable to fly). Bees slow down and behave as though they have been chilled (carbaryl)
- ◆ Poor brood development, with adult bees unaffected (novaluron and spirodiclofen)
- ◆ Dead brood, dead newly emerged workers, or abnormal queen behavior, such as egg laying in a poor pattern (carbaryl)
- ◆ Queenless hives (acephate, carbaryl, malathion)
- ◆ Poor queen development in colonies used to produce queens, with adult bees unaffected (coumaphos)

Honey bee recovery from pesticide poisoning

If a honey bee colony has lost many of its foragers, but has sufficient brood and adequate stores of uncontaminated pollen and honey, it may recover without any intervention. Move bees to a pesticide-free foraging area if available. If sufficient forage is unavailable, feed them with sugar syrup and pollen substitute, and provide clean water to aid their recovery. Protect them from extreme heat and cold, and, if needed, combine weak colonies.

If the pesticide has accumulated within pollen or nectar stores,

brood and workers may continue to die until the colony is lost. Many pesticides readily transfer into beeswax, and you may consider replacing the comb with new foundation, drawn comb from unaffected colonies, or shaking the bees into a new hive and destroying the old comb and woodenware. Replacing brood comb on a regular schedule (typically 3 to 5 years) may prevent accumulation of pesticides to deleterious levels in brood comb wax.

Managed solitary bees

A distinctive sign of poisoning in alfalfa leafcutting bees is an inordinate number of dead males on the ground in front of a shelter or a lack of nesting activity by the females. Female alfalfa leafcutting bees usually forage within a few hundred yards of the field shelter, so the shelters closest to the source of the insecticide are more severely affected.

Pesticide poisonings are more difficult to detect in alkali bees, but watch for a lack of activity at the nesting beds or more dead males than expected. The males tend to spend most of their time at the nesting sites, so that may be your first clear sign of mortality. Females are more likely to die in the field. Female alkali bees forage up to a mile or more away from the alkali bee bed, so they can be killed by insecticides that male bees do not contact. An alkali bee bed without females often will have male bees flying in circles above the surface for several days after the poisoning incident.

Bumble bees and non-managed native bees

Without a marked hive or nesting site, pesticide poisonings in wild bees can easily go unobserved. Bumble bees and other wild bees experience many of the same symptoms of pesticide exposures as managed bees. Bumble bee colonies are composed of fewer individuals than honey bees and can be more sensitive to pesticides. Additional research is needed to fully understand the impact of pesticides on native bee populations, some of which are showing large population declines and even going extinct.

For information on bumble bee declines, see <http://www.xerces.org/bumblebees/>.

Ways to reduce bee poisoning

Beekeeper-grower cooperation is the most effective way to reduce bee poisoning; its importance cannot be overstated. The underlying cause of most bee poisoning incidents is a lack of awareness, rather than an intent to do harm. Most pest control programs can be modified so that little or no bee poisoning occurs, without undue cost or inconvenience to the grower. Both beekeepers and growers benefit from developing working relationships and familiarizing themselves with each other's management practices. Discussions and contracts between growers and beekeepers should include:

- ◆ Coordination of crop timing with dates of apiary arrival and departure
- ◆ Details of the beekeeper's responsibility to provide strong, effective colonies for crop pollination
- ◆ Details of the grower's responsibility to safeguard bees from poisoning
- ◆ Agreement on who is responsible for providing supplemental water and feed
- ◆ Pest management practices in the cropping system before colonies are delivered
- ◆ Pesticides to be used on a crop while beehives are present
- ◆ Buffers between treated areas and apiaries

- ◆ Informing neighboring growers and applicators of apiary locations
- ◆ Possible pesticide use in adjacent crops
- ◆ Location of honey bee colonies. Registering colonies with your state agriculture department or pesticide regulation department may help to improve communication between pesticide applicators and beekeepers.

For more information regarding active ingredients of commonly used pesticides and their effect on bees

Specific information regarding active ingredients of commonly used pesticides and their effect on bees:

How to Reduce Bee Poisoning from Pesticides (PNW 591): catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/pnw591

UC IPM / Bee precaution pesticide rating: www2.ipm.ucanr.edu/bee_precaution/

Alfalfa Leafcutting Bee Pests

Natalia Bjorklund, Katie Lamke, Surabhi Gupta Vakil, and Judy Wu-Smart

Latest revision—March 2021

In all cases, follow the instructions on the pesticide label. The *PNW Insect Management Handbook* has no legal status, whereas the pesticide label is a legal document. Read the product label before making any pesticide applications.

Protect pollinators: See *How to Reduce Bee Poisoning from Pesticides*.

Note: Products are listed in alphabetical order and *not* in order of preference or superiority of pest control.

Alfalfa leafcutting bee—Chalcid wasp

Includes

Monodontomerus obscurus, *M. montivaga*, *M. osmiae*, and *Pteromalus venustus*

Pest description and damage Chalcid wasps (males: 2-3 mm, females: 3-4 mm) are metallic blue or green with red eyes. Female wasps pierce the upper surface of cells or cell caps to deposit 10 to 50 eggs on the surface of mature bee larvae or pupae within the bee cocoon. Wasp larvae will consume bee larvae and pupate within the host cocoon. Development of wasps from egg to mature adult takes about one month, at which time adults emerge through round holes chewed in the host body wall. Adult wasps emerge about 2 or more days before alfalfa leafcutting bees begin emergence and male wasps typically do not leave bee cells. Infestation levels may build up over the summer and may reach harmful levels if not managed well.

Management—traps

The most important type of control for alfalfa leafcutting bee pests is the maintenance of clean bee stocks and nesting media. Nests made from drilled boards and polystyrene blocks are solid and minimize potential entry points particularly in the rear of the nest. Remove nests from field immediately after nest period to reduce wasp exposure. In addition to changing nest media annually, utilizing emergence traps or sprays to control pest populations during incubation and/or emergence will exclude most pest species.

To reduce wasp population levels, rear out parasitic wasps from bee nests in an incubation room. Place a few drops of liquid soap or detergent in water pan traps under ultraviolet lights on the floors of the incubation rooms. Wasps will be attracted to the lights, fall into water pans, and drown. Place bee board into field before adult bees emerge.

For more information:

Parker, F.D. and P.F. Torchi. Management of Wild Honey Bees (<http://www.beesource.com/resources/usda/management-of-wild-bees/>)

Eves, J.D., D.F. Mayer, and C.A. Johansen. 1980. "Parasites, predators and nest destroyers of the alfalfa leafcutting bee, *Megachile rotundata*." Washington State University, Agric. Exp. Stn. Pullman, WA, Western Regional Extension Publication No. 32. 1980.

Alfalfa leafcutting bee—Chalkbrood (fungal disease)

Ascosphaera aggregata

Pest description and damage Chalkbrood is a severe fungal disease caused by several species of *Ascosphaera*, however, *A. aggregata* is the principle species that infects alfalfa leafcutting bees. It was first reported in the U.S. in 1973 and remains to be one of the greatest causes of alfalfa leafcutting bee deaths. Bee equipment can be contaminated by fungal spores facilitating the spread of the disease. Adult bees emerging from contaminated cells and bee larvae consuming contaminated pollen may become infected and continue to spread fungal spores. Spores germinate in the midgut and penetrate into the body cavity. Chalky white coloration occurs when the mycelium fills the body cavity and spores are released when the cuticle of infected bee cadavers rupture. Newly emerging adults become contaminated with spores as they chew through cells with spore-laden cadavers then spores are transferred to provisions of the new nest.

Management

Replacing old used nest material can reduce or limit the spread of chalkbrood. Alternatively, decontaminate bee equipment and nesting materials using bleach or heat. Bee cells and nest materials can also be dipped in bleach or 3% solution of sodium hypochlorite for 1-2 minutes to reduce or prevent spreading of the infection. Dry bee cells away from direct sunlight or excessive heat. Bleaching and drying should be completed before incubation. Solid wood blocks, boards, and laminates can be heated in a kiln at 250°F to kill chalkbrood spores. Wood and polystyrene nesting boards can also be dipped in 5% solution of sodium hypochlorite. Disinfect boards in the spring and allow them to dry completely before use. Fumigation of cells and equipment using formaldehyde may be more effective than bleach or heat treatments. Formaldehyde, however, can be toxic and dangerous for the handler, therefore neutralization with ammonium bicarbonate is strongly suggested. Formaldehyde gas reacts with ammonia gas to produce hexamine which is relatively harmless to the handler, bee brood, and environment.

Loose cell management method where bee cells are contained loosely together in over-wintering bins or trays may improve ease of sanitation measures and reduce some pest problems. The loose cell method allows for the removal of chalkbrood cadavers and prevents newly emerging adult bees from having to chew their way through chalkbrood cadavers and becoming exposed. Note, however, that loose cell management may pose wide-spread risk of spore exposure.

Pollen balls

"Pollen ball" is a term used to describe cells provisioned with resources but contains no healthy egg or brood. Several reasons may contribute to pollen ball formation, such as the quality of floral resource, nectar to pollen ratio in the mass provision, pesticide contamination, and pathogens. Other factors may include position of the bee domiciles in the field, humidity, limited availability of the foraging resources in the fields, and overcrowding or high bee densities of bees nesting in similar areas.

For more information:

Baird, C.R. and R.M. Bitner. Loose Cell Management of Leafcutting Bees. Western Regional Extension Publication 12.

James, R.R. 2005. Impact of disinfecting nesting boards on chalkbrood control in the alfalfa leafcutting bee. *J. Econ. Entomol* 98(4): 1094-1100.

M.S. Goettel, G.M. Duke, and G.C. Kozub. 2014. Characterization of “pollen balls” in commercial populations of the alfalfa leafcutting bee, *Megachile rotundata* in Canada, *Journal of Apicultural Research* 53:4, 496-499

Alfalfa leafcutting bee—Clerid beetle

Trichodes ornatus

Pest description and damage The ornate checkered beetle is about 0.3 to 0.5 inch long and usually has a checkered black and yellow or red patterning. The first instar attaches onto adult bees visiting flowers and hitches a ride to the bee nest. Beetle larvae attack bee eggs, consume pollen provisions, and causes damage to cells as it tunnels through the bee nest.

Management—maintenance

Infestations are associated with high concentrations of weeds surrounding bee nests. Clearing weeds from nest areas decrease the probability of beetle larvae infestations, although beetle infestations are typically no longer a major concern.

Alfalfa leafcutting bee—Eulophid wasp

Melittobia acasta

Pest description These small, dark brown wasps (adults 1 to 1.5 mm) are ectoparasitoid idiobionts that develop gregariously. Female adults chew through cocoons and repeatedly insert ovipositor where she then feeds on the hemolymph from the wound, and lays eggs. Eggs are initially laid on the ventral side of the host in batches of 4 to 12, and take from 15 to 28 days to develop through four instars. Several hundred progeny may be produced over multiple successive generations each year. Females prefer to oviposit when the BOB are in pre-pupa or pupa stages, and are attracted to cocoon volatiles, frass and acetic acid.

Management

Use of traps when rearing alfalfa leafcutting bees is recommended from May to November to attract and control parasites that emerge from nests returning from the field. Plastic strips coated with Dichlorvos is an effective trap in climate-controlled rooms. Parasites directly exposed to strip die within 2 hr, or 7 to 8 hr if buffered by a cocoon. The strips should be used as soon as the first parasites emerge, but with great care as to not expose the bee for a prolonged amount of time. No predators upon *Melittobia* have been recorded.

For more information:

De Wael, L., M. De Greef and O. Van Laere. 1995. Biology and control of *Melittobia acasta*. *Bee World*, 76(2): 72-76.

Alfalfa leafcutting bee—Sapygid wasp

Sapyga pumila

Pest description and damage Sapygid wasps are tiny and black with yellow markings along the body. The first instar larvae of this wasp-like parasite is only about 0.1 the size of the bee egg, but it is able to puncture the bee egg, either parasitizing the host or causing the host egg to collapse.

Management—emergence traps

Sapygid wasps will spend the night in bee holes but prefer to dwell in smaller holes. Night station traps target this behavior and are effective. They are made of hollow plastic pipes, containing insecticide inside, with small (2.5 mm diameter) holes. Sapygid wasps are attracted to the holes at night but once inside they are killed by the insecticide. White, light blue or green painted

emergence traps placed in front of the bee nest are also effective at capturing sapygid wasps.

For more information:

Pitts-Singer T.L. and J.H. Cane. 2011. The alfalfa leafcutting bee, *Megachile rotundata*: the world’s most intensively managed solitary bee. *Annu. Rev. Entomol* 56: 221-237.

Alkali Bee Pests

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Alkali bee—Black oil beetle

Meloe niger

Pest description and damage One of the blister beetles, the black oil beetle is a predator of all larval stages of the alkali bee, destroys eggs and feeds on host resources. Black oil beetles (8-18 mm) are wingless with large abdomens. Adults emerge from alkali beds late February to early April and feed on various neighboring plants. The mated female lays about 3,000 eggs in the ground. The first larval instar of the black oil beetle, an active triungulin, climbs onto a plant and attaches onto visiting alkali bees, hitching a ride back to the bee nest. The beetle larvae consumes the cell provisions in the bee nest and during its last larval stage it digs through the soil to find and eat at least one bee larva. Then the beetle larvae burrows deeper into the ground and roughly 17% remains inactive for up to 2 years while the other 83% continue to pupate and emerge as adults.

Management—cultural control

Weed control

Control primary weeds in and around alfalfa fields to reduce the likelihood of blister beetles establishing themselves along field margins and migrating into alfalfa fields.

Pitfall trapping

A ditch 4-6 inches wide and 6-10 inches deep can be dug around the bee bed and lined with plastic as a pitfall trap for emerging adult beetles. Insecticide can be sprayed into the ditch and the beetles will be trapped in the insecticide and die.

For more information:

C. Johansen, D. Mayer, A. Stanford, and C. Kiouss. 1982. *Alkali Bees: Their Biology and Management for Alfalfa Seed Production in the Pacific Northwest*. Washington State University. Pacific Northwest Extension Publication 0155.

Alkali bee—Bomber fly

Heterostylum robustum

Pest description and damage The bomber fly is an external parasite that feeds on mature alkali bee larvae. Bomber flies are very hairy, similar in size to the alkali bee, and usually brown to white in color with black and yellow to cream strips on the abdomen which mimic the patterning of bees (they are also known as the Bee Fly). Bomber larvae are C-shaped, brown, leathery, and about the same size as alkali pre-pupae. Female bomber flies flick eggs down or near alkali nest entrances. Newly hatched bomber flies move into the bee cells but do not feed until the alkali bee matures or is at the prepupal development stage. Each bomber fly larva will consume the bodily fluids of one alkali bee larva before moving out of the cell and overwintering near the soil surface. Pupation occurs in the late spring and adults emerge out of the soil surface.

Management—cultural control

The parasitic flies emerge in the early morning hours but cannot fly. The most effective control measure is to walk the alkali beds between 9 am and 12 noon for a two- to three-week period beginning just before the emergence of alkali bees, killing flies with a fly swatter or by stepping on them. Shallow rototilling may reduce fly larvae numbers since fly larvae overwinter 1.25 inches shallower than bees. This may, however, pose a higher risk to bees. Alternatively, maintaining sparse weed or light grass ground cover about four inches tall can reduce the rate of parasitism. Well populated bee sites can also provide effective defense because dense bee flights will deter oviposition by flies.

For more information:

Cane, J.H. 2008. A native ground-nesting bee (*Nomia melanderi*) sustainably managed to pollinate alfalfa across an intensively agricultural landscape. *Apidologie*, 39(3), 315–323. <https://doi.org/10.1051/apido:2008013>

Alkali bee—Pavement ant

Tetramorium caespitum

Pest description and damage Pavement ants (2-3 mm) are dark brown with paler legs and antennae. Ant nests can be found in exposed soils, under pavement or stones and in alkali bee beds. Ants will actively kill adult bees to get to and consume bee larvae and pollen from bee cells.

Management—chemical control

Pavement ant colonies or ant bed locations need to be identified and treated in order to remove pavement ant pests. Night time inspections will reveal more foraging ants. Follow trails to locate ant beds. Granules containing cypermethrin or bifenthrin are suggested for control treatments and may reduce risk of non-target exposure, however both are toxic to bees and should be used with caution. They are fast-acting contact insecticides that target foragers but not the colony and therefore may be ineffective long-term treatments. Baits with active ingredients propoxur or indoxacarb are also too fast-acting and are not effective controls. Protein baits containing hydramethylnon, fipronil, or boric acid (borate or various forms of sodium borate), and avermectin B (abamectin) are slow-acting and attractive to pavements ants making them more likely to be brought back to the colony and queen. Hydramethylnon is relatively non-toxic to bees; fipronil and boric acid are toxic and pose a high risk to bees. Use covered-bait stations to reduce exposure to bees and only when ants are present. Place baits in areas where ant activity has been observed or along ant trails. Applying late winter and early spring baits, when populations are growing, may be the most effective timing of treatments. Note that

ant baits and treatment registrations change over time. Read and follow current label instructions for effective control.

For more information:

Rust, M.K. and D.H. Choe. 2012. Pest Notes: Ants. University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources Statewide Integrated Pest Management Program Publication (7411).

Alkali bee—Thickheaded conopid fly

Physoconops fronto
Zodion obliquefasciatum

Pest description and damage The two species of thickheaded conopid flies are internal parasites of only adult alkali bees. The conopid adults are reddish in color and are about half the size of alkali bees, with a large distinct head and large eyes. Mated female conopids perch near nest holes and wait for returning female alkali bees. As the female bee approaches the nest bed, the conopid dives down, penetrates the bee with its ovipositor and deposits an egg into the bee abdomen. Eggs hatch in one day and larvae feed internally on host tissue then overwinter and pupate inside the bee. Infested bees may continue to provision cells with pollen and lay eggs however eggs are either non-fertile or so malnourished they are unable to hatch. The presence of numerous sealed cells in bee beds that contain pollen provisions but no larvae may be indicative of high infestation levels by parasitic conopid flies. Infested adult bees weaken as the fly larvae matures and the fly emerges from its pupal case during the same period of bee emergence the following spring. Parasitism usually occurs during the mid to late season and eventually results in reduced longevity and decreased progeny of the bee.

Management

Sticky traps Yellow and white stakes banded with Tanglefoot or other sticky substance set in a 10 x 20 foot grid pattern in large beds or 10 feet apart in rows placed on edges of beds. To minimize possibility of trapping bees apply sticky band at least two inches below the top of each stake. Stakes should be put out before alkali bees emerge so bees can establish a flight pattern to avoid traps. Stakes should also be cleaned and sticky coating reapplied weekly.

For more information:

Stephen W.P. 1959. *Maintaining Alkali Bees for Alfalfa Seed Production*. Station Bulletin 568. http://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/concern/administrative_report_or_publications/rn3011720

Walsh, D.B. and R.A. Boydston. Integrated pest management on alfalfa seed: a two-year report 2008-2009. http://ipm.wsu.edu/field/pdf/SeedSchoolReport2008_209.pdf

Alkali bee—Flesh fly

(only found as a parasite of alkali bee in Idaho):

Euphytomima nomiivora

Pest description and damage The flesh fly, is a parasite of the alkali bee egg. It has only been found parasitizing alkali bees only in Idaho and Utah. The adult is about the size of a house fly and has an abdomen with three bands of black, alternating with three bands of silvery grey, and red terminal segments. Adult female flesh flies deposit newly hatched maggots in or near the nest of the alkali bee. Flesh fly maggots crawl into a bee cell killing the alkali bee egg or larva and eating the pollen ball. Only one maggot can develop in each cell, but leaves the cell to pupate.

Management No control is known.

Alkali bee—Less-significant parasites

Humpbacked fly: *Phalacrotophora halictorum*

Robber flies: *Promachus aldrichii* and *P. nigripes*, *Diogmites grossus*, and *Proctacanthus milbertii*

Picturewinged flies: *Euxesta rubida* and *E. scutellaris*

Cuckoo bees: *Nomada suavis* and *Triepeolous* spp.

Velvet ant: *Dasymutilla* spp.

Tiphiid wasp: *Myrmosula* spp.

Wedged-shaped beetle: *Ripiphorus solidaginis*

Management These pests do not require control.

For more information:

C. Johansen, D. Mayer, A. Stanford, C. Kious. 1982. Alkali Bees: Their Biology and Management for Alfalfa Seed Production in the Pacific Northwest. Washington State University. A Pacific Northwest Extension Publication (15-23)

Alkali bee—Stonebrood

Aspergillus flavus, *Aspergillus tamarii*

Aspergillus fungi causes stonebrood disease in bees. Primary route of infection is by ingestion of the spores, their germination in the gut which causes invasive mycosis and host death. Both adult and larvae can be affected. It is a general saprophyte and opportunistic pathogen of immunocompromised (due to pesticide exposure, lack of forage resources) hosts and reproduces by producing cleistothecia and asexual conidia.

For more information:

S.E.F. Evison, A.B. Jensen. 2018. The biology and prevalence of fungal diseases in managed and wild bees, *Current Opinion in Insect Science*, Volume 26, pp. 105-113, ISSN 2214-5745, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cois.2018.02.010>.

Blue Orchard Bee Pests

Katie Lamke and Judy Wu-Smart

Latest revision—March 2021

In all cases, follow the instructions on the pesticide label. The *PNW Insect Management Handbook* has no legal status, whereas the pesticide label is a legal document. Read the product label before making any pesticide applications.

Protect pollinators: See How to Reduce Bee Poisoning from Pesticides.

Note: Products are listed in alphabetical order and *not* in order of preference or superiority of pest control.

Blue orchard bee—Blister beetle

Tricrania stansburyi

Pest description A cleptoparasitic beetle (10-12 mm) with black and red wing coloring and whose larvae steal food provisions from the host. Adult female beetles deposit eggs on flowers, which emerge as larvae (triungulins) that attach to a foraging female blue orchard bee's (BOB) leg hairs. The bee then transports the beetle larva to the nest, introducing it to a pollen-provisioned BOB brood cell. After the adult BOB seals the brood cell containing a triungulin, the beetle larva kills the deposited BOB egg and consumes the pollen provisions. Only one beetle occupies and develops in one bee cell.

Management Infested cells within paper straw can be identified and removed.

Blue orchard bee—Chalcid wasp

Monodontomerus spp.

Pest description These small (males: 2-3 mm, females: 3-4 mm) wasps are metallic dark green to black parasitoids with red eyes that enter bee nests through cracks. Female wasps typically deposit about 10 eggs into a developing host BOB pre-pupa or pupa; a wasp may lay eggs in several host pupae. Wasp larvae feed internally in the BOB pupae and pupate within the dead bee. Development of wasps from egg to mature adult takes about one month, at which time adults emerge through round holes chewed in the host body wall. Mature wasp larvae overwinter in the cocoons of bees. Infestation levels may build up over the summer and may reach harmful levels if not managed well.

Management Chalcid adults become active toward the end of the BOB nesting period and therefore it is important to remove nesting materials soon before or after nesting activities have ended to minimize initial infestation. Mosquito screen (with mesh < 1 mm) can be used to isolate and maintain chalcid-free nests. Physical barriers, such as double-sided tape, may be used in the back and entrance of the nests and help reduce accessibility to wasps. Paper straws (with walls >1 mm) can be used as inserts in cardboard tubes and nesting blocks to minimize parasitism. In storage areas, adult wasps may be attracted to blacklights and drowned in a tray of baby oil or detergent-containing water.

Blue orchard bee—Chalkbrood

Ascospaera torchioi

Pest description BOB larvae become infected by ingesting spores from contaminated pollen and nectar provisions. Long filaments penetrate the gut epithelium and cause death of the immature bee. Spores are spread to adult BOBs when they chew their way through a nest cell containing a dead larva. These spores can also be deposited on pollen and nectar provisions as the nest is built. Some infested BOBs that die during pupation after consuming the entire spore-containing provision show a continuous darkened layer of chalkbrood spores throughout the body. When infested BOBs do not fully consume contaminated provisions, the larvae are only partially filled with spore aggregations. Uninfested newly emerging adult BOBs may become infected with spore dust when they chew their way through a nest cell containing a chalkbrood-infested larva cadaver. Then these spores may be transferred into the provisions of the new nest.

Management BOB immatures should be reared at appropriate temperatures. Over-winter BOBs for at least 180 days $\leq 45^{\circ}\text{F}$ and emerge 1 to 7 days after warming between $72\text{--}78^{\circ}\text{F}$. Removal of infested cells is a simple way to control chalkbrood. The use of new nesting cavities is important, as spores can remain viable for years. In winter, randomly inspect 10% of nests for chalkbrood cadavers (and presence of other beetle and mite parasites by visually observing cocoons). If more than 10% of nests examined are diseased or parasitized, inspection of all remaining nests is necessary.

Blue orchard bee—Checkered flower beetle

Trichodes ornatus

Pest description This beetle (7-15 mm) is metallic dark blue with bright orange to yellow wing patterns and is commonly seen among many cavity-nesting bees. Adult female beetles lay eggs near bee nest entrances. The first three beetle larval instars feed on bee eggs, larvae and pollen provisions and cause major brood and nest damage as they move from cell to cell.

Management Removing BOB nesting materials shortly before or after the end of the nesting season is an effective management technique. Plastic container traps embedded with pheromones that attract adults beetles are also commercially available.

Blue orchard bee—Cuckoo bee

Stelis montana

Pest description A cleptoparasitic bee (adults 8-10 mm) of which the larvae steal food provisions from the host. Female adults lay eggs in uncapped BOB cells while the BOB females are away foraging. Cuckoo bee larvae kill BOB larvae and consume the pollen-nectar provision. Only one parasite develops in each cell.

Management Cuckoo bee pupae may be identified by inspecting semi-translucent straws against a light bulb. Cuckoo bee frass is long and curly and cocoons are harder than those of BOB. Infested straws containing cuckoo bee pupae may be dissected and removed effectively. Larger nest blocks (96-cavity) have been shown to produce more BOB progeny with lower parasitism rates compared to smaller nest blocks (15-cavity).

Blue orchard bee—Eulophid wasp

Melittobia acasta

Pest description These small, dark brown wasps (adults 1-1.5 mm) are ectoparasitoid idiobionts that develop gregariously. Female adults chew through cocoons and repeatedly insert ovipositor where she then feeds on the hemolymph from the wound, and lays eggs. Eggs are initially laid on the ventral side of the host in batches of 4 to 12, and take from 15 to 28 days to develop through four instars. Several hundred progeny may be produced over multiple successive generations each year. Females prefer to oviposit when the BOB are in pre-pupa or pupa stages, and are attracted to cocoon volatiles, frass and acetic acid.

Management Plastic strips coated with Dichlorvos is an effective trap in climate-controlled rooms, and are most effective when used from May-November. Parasites directly exposed to strip die within 2 hours, or 7 to 8 hours if buffered by a cocoon. The strips should be used as soon as the first parasites emerge, but with great care as to not expose the bee for a prolonged amount of time. No predators of *Melittobia* have been recorded.

For more information:

De Wael, L., M. De Greef, and O. Van Laere. 1995. Biology and control of *Melittobia acasta*. *Bee World*, 76(2), 72-76.

Blue orchard bee—Hairy-fingered mite/ pollen mite

Chaetodactylus krombeini

Pest description A common cleptoparasitic mite (males: 0.45 mm, females: 0.60 mm) that appear white and ovoid and reproduce rapidly. Female mites lay eggs in BOB cells. Immature mites feed on the pollen grains of the provisions. Eggs may be punctured by mites or young larvae may starve. Mites typically cannot move between cell partitions unless mud partitions are damaged or cracked. Thousands of mites may inhabit infested cells by the end of the summer. Phoretic nymphal mites cling to bee hairs and spread to other nest cavities. The mites physically hinder the flight of bees. Non-phoretic mites remain in the cavity where they hatch and reproduce.

Management Mites exhibit susceptibility to dehydration in the early stages of their lives. To control, use porous nesting materials and wood or paper inserts. Nest boxes may be taken down early. Incubate the larval nests in the nest box under warm and dry conditions, around 85°F for several weeks to months. Check the nests periodically for mature adults. If using straw inserts, examine whole nests by splitting the straws lengthwise. Remove remaining mite-infested cells. When all bees have reached maturity, they may be moved outdoors temporarily (a few days) and subsequently moved into the refrigerator for overwinter storage. *Chaetodactylus krombeini* mites infesting horn-faced bees (*Osmia cornifrons*) have been controlled using formic acid and wintergreen oil fumigants. If this technique is used, care should be taken due to the potential of killing the BOB.

For more information:

Sugden, E. 2001. Mitey bees: the blue orchard bee's mite pest (<http://crawford.tardigrade.net/bugs/BugofMonth35.html>)

Blue orchard bee—Sapygid wasp

Sapyga spp.

Pest description These wasps (8-14 mm) are a common cleptoparasite (larvae steal food provisions of the host). Females lay their eggs in sealed brood cells. Emerging larvae kill the bee larvae and consume the bee's provisions.

Management Night station traps, commercially available for *Sapyga pumila*, a parasite on *Megachilae rotundata*, may be modified to accommodate the larger size of sapyga adults parasitizing BOBs.

For more information:

Bosch, J. and W.P. Kemp. 2001. How to Manage the Blue Orchard Bee as an Orchard Pollinator. Sustainable Agricultural Network. National Agricultural Library. Beltsville, MD (http://sare.org/publications/bee/blue_orchard_bee.pdf)

Stanley, C. 2012. Blue Orchard Bee (*Osmia lignaria*). Utah State University Extension and Utah Plant Pest Diagnostic Laboratory. ENT-162-12, 1-4.

Honey Bee Pests

Walter S. Sheppard

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In all cases, follow the instructions on the pesticide label. The PNW Insect Management Handbook has no legal status, whereas the pesticide label is a legal document. Read the product label before making any pesticide applications.

Protect pollinators: See How to Reduce Bee Poisoning from Pesticides.

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Honey bee—Small hive beetle

Aethina tumida

Pest description The small hive beetle was first reported to occur in the United States in 1998. The SHB is believed to be native to sub-Saharan Africa and now can be found in most states in the U.S. As a hive pest, SHB larvae feed on honey and pollen stores and may also affect brood combs. The major SHB problem reported from states where the beetle occurs has been damage to stored honey and combs. Storage of honey under conditions of reduced relative humidity (< 50%) has been shown to be effective in preventing SHB egg hatch and reducing larval damage. This pest was reported in Washington State in 2008, but has not been associated with significant losses of stored honey, equipment or live colonies.

Honey bee—Tracheal mite

Acarapis woodi

Pest description Tracheal mites are microscopic parasites that live in the tracheal tubes of adult honey bees. To identify them, bees must be dissected under a microscope. Infected colonies of bees have dwindling populations, do not cluster well and often die during the winter.

Management—chemical control

- menthol—Treat in fall or early spring. Treatment must end one month before the first nectar flow.
- vegetable oil—1 part vegetable oil plus 2 parts white granulated sugar, formed into a 0.5 lb patty. Place on brood nest top bars during spring and autumn.

Management—alternative control

Genetics—Honey bees vary greatly in their susceptibility to tracheal mites. Certain populations of bees are tolerant of tracheal mites and the use of honey bees maintained and selected for desirable apicultural traits and survival in the presence of tracheal mites can provide a viable alternative to chemical treatments.

For more information:

Honey bee tracheal mites: Gone? But not for Good. P.A. Moore, M. E. Wilson and J. A. Skinner. (bee-health.extension.org) 2015, 2019

Honey bee—Varroa mite

Varroa destructor

Pest description and damage These mites are external parasites of honey bees, feeding on the lipid reserves of adult bees, pupae and larvae. Mites are brown to reddish brown: females are the size of a pinhead, males are smaller (but are never seen alive outside of the brood cell). Parasitism results in reduced longevity or mortality of individual bees and heavy parasitism can lead to death of the colony. Varroa mites are implicated as significant vectors of honey bee viruses.

Management—monitoring

Varroa mite levels can be determined by placing a half cup of bees in a jar and adding 2 tablespoons of powdered sugar. Shaking the jar dislodges the mites which can be emptied onto a surface and counted. Vaseline coated trays placed under screens on the hive bottom board will catch falling mites for monitoring purposes (see reference).

Management—cultural control

Drone trapping

Varroa mites are preferentially attracted to drone brood during their reproductive phase, thus removal of infested drone combs (drone trapping) can be used to reduce mite populations. Drone comb can be inserted into colonies, removed in the capped brood stage and then frozen to kill the mites. Once re-inserted into the colony, the bees will remove and recycle the nutrient rich dead brood and the combs can be reused. This is most effective in the spring and early summer.

Resistant honey bee stocks

Genetic differences in resistance or tolerance to Varroa mites are known to occur among honey bees subspecies and some commercial strains. A number of behavioral or physiological mechanisms appear to be involved in the resistance, including “Varroa sensitive hygiene,” in which mite-infested cells are opened and cleaned out by the worker bees.

Management—chemical control

Resistance to some mite-control chemicals has been reported (including fluvalinate and coumaphos) and beekeepers should evaluate mite levels before and after treatment to ascertain that the products used are providing effective control (see monitoring above).

- amitraz (Apivar)—Currently available in a strip formulation and approved for use in all states.
- coumaphos (CheckMite Strips)—Remove all surplus honey before treatment.
- fluvalinate (Apistan)—Treat before honey flow or during the summer dearth. Destroy any honey left in hive during treatment. Do not re-use strips. If pesticide resistance is suspected, use alternative control measures.
- formic acid (Mite Away Quick Strips, Formic Pro)—Colony must be reduced to 1 to 2 supers deep. Allowable daytime temperature highs are between 50°F and 92°F. Remove pads from hive if daily temperature highs exceed 92°F during first 7 days of treatment.
- hop beta-acids (HopGuard 3)—Derived from the hop plant and labeled for use even during the honey flow. Currently available with full Section 3 registration. Most effective during times with little or no brood present.
- menthol, eucalyptus, thymol (Api Life Var, Apiguard)—An essential oil-based treatment. Do not use during honey flows. Do not use when surplus honey supers are installed. Do not harvest honey from brood chambers or colony feed supers. Do not use at temperatures above 90°F. Two treatments per year are permitted.

For more information:

<https://honeybeehealthcoalition.org/varroa/>