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Two Lamorinda Beehives Part of National Study on Colony Collapse

By Amanda Kuehn



A pollen trap was installed at this hive entrance to collect pollen for the study. Photo Andy Scheck

Vigo, local bee keeper and owner of The Bee Ranchers, LLC. Vigo feels the urban/suburban area is ideal for honey bees. "Generally speaking we're not using pesticides," he noted. "Four of my aviaries [including the two in Lamorinda] are part of the study. I'm very much looking forward to the conclusion."

Sullivan will collect samples using a pollen trap. "The pollen will indicate what sort of pesticides the bees are bringing back," he said. Pollen samples will be sent to a lab in North Carolina. Nectar samples will also be collected and sent to the USDA for analysis. "The goal is to identify what lawn and garden pesticides might be in pollen and nectar," said Sullivan.

The first samples were collected in mid-July and will be collected once a month for a year. Results should be published sometime afterward next fall.

There's been a recent buzz about bees. According to annual reports issued by the USDA, honeybee loss has averaged at 29.6 percent over the past eight years, a rate that the U.S. government deems economically unsustainable. Bees are responsible for pollinating of a third of all crops, making them crucial for agriculture.

"It's called colony collapse disorder," said environmental toxicologist Joseph Sullivan. "Nobody really understands what's causing it." This mystery has led to a number of new studies, one of which involves local hives.

The study, directed by the University of Florida and funded by Bayer Crop Science, will evaluate pollen and nectar samples taken from hives in urban and suburban areas. Selection was a tiered process based on interest and location. One of the 15 Bay Area hives selected is located in Moraga, another in Orinda.

"I've kept bees about seven years," said Mike

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