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Bee decline 'may hit food crops'

Food production in Northern Ireland could be hit by the decline in the wild bee population, a leading beekeeper has said.



Swift action is needed "to halt the bee decline"

Three of the UK's 25 species are already extinct and more face the same fate unless fast action is taken.

Jim Fletcher of the Ulster Beekeepers' Association said it had been a very bad spring for the bees.

"It was a very bad April and May and the bees have not been able to forage as they require," he said.

"The bumble bees have had problems with late flowering and the queens haven't had the energy to build big nests for the production of their workers."

The bee problem had been ongoing for several years and was partly down to people having "nice tidy gardens, fields and hedgerows", said Mr Fletcher, who has about 500,000 bees in his County Down orchard.

"It means there are no wild places for the bees to nest and for the bumble bees to produce their colonies."

A tiny mite had decimated the wild bee population in Northern Ireland, he said.

"This is to such an extent that we haven't got sufficient bees to pollinate the major fruit producing crops."

Bees help to pollinate every flowering plant.

"The possibility is that if we do not take sufficient care, that we may run into problems with food production."

Mr Fletcher advised people to "leave a few wild corners in their garden" to help the bees.

'Falling bee numbers'

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Ulster Unionist environment spokesman Sam Gardiner called on all gardeners to grow more traditional local plants "to help reverse the decline in the bee population".


"Bees perform a vital role in the pollination of plants and are vital to eco-systems. Without bees, many native species of plants will disappear and this will have a knock-on effect on other species," he said.


"Many crops depend on bees for pollination and some, such as broad, field and runner beans are heavily dependent on them. Without the insects there would be little or no crop to harvest."

A new organisation - the Bumblebee Conservation Trust - has been launched with the aim of halting falling bee numbers.

Enthusiasts behind the trust, based at Stirling University, have urged as many people as possible to get involved.

As part of its conservation work, the organisation is encouraging the public to plant wildflowers, which provide nectar and pollen for bees and other wildlife.

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