

## Falling insect numbers dangerous to humans

28th July, 2014



The number of insects in the world has fallen by 45 per cent in the past 35 years. Scientists say this could be dangerous for humans. A report on insect numbers

has been published in the journal 'Science'. It says the human population has doubled since 1980 while the number of insects has nearly halved. One of the biggest reasons for this loss of insects is deforestation. Many of the places where insects live are disappearing because of new cities and land being used for farming. Another reason is global warming. Scientists say that in the UK, the number of beetles, butterflies, bees and wasps has fallen by up to 60 per cent. Many countries are worried about the disappearance of bees and butterflies.

Scientists say the decline in insect populations will lead to many problems for humans. One of the biggest dangers is that there will be fewer insects to pollinate flowers. This means that farmers will have problems growing food. The lead author of the report, professor Rodolfo Dirzo, said falling numbers of insects could also lead to more disease in humans. He said rats and mice would have less food to eat so they will move to cities and bring diseases with them. Dr Ben Collen from London University said we needed to stop more insects from dying. He added that scientists must understand, "what species are winning and losing in the fight for survival". He said this knowledge would help us to protect the "helpful" insects.

Sources: *Telegraph / Daily Mail / Mirror*

## Writing

Which are more helpful, bees or ants? Which do you like better? Why?

## Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

*insects / dangerous / report / published / reasons / deforestation / global warming / decline / populations / flowers / diseases / species / winning / knowledge / survival*

## True / False

- The number of insects fell by 35% in the past 45 years. T / F
- A report was published in the science journal "Insects Today". T / F
- The number of people on Earth has doubled since 1980. T / F
- Bee and butterfly populations fell by up to 60% in the UK. T / F
- There could be problems with insects not pollinating flowers. T / F
- A professor said fewer insects would mean fewer diseases for humans. T / F
- A fall in the number of insects would mean rats leaving cities. T / F
- Scientists need to know which insects are winning the fight for survival. T / F

## Synonym Match

- |                 |                 |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. fallen       | a. difficulties |
| 2. humans       | b. agriculture  |
| 3. disappearing | c. prevent      |
| 4. farming      | d. people       |
| 5. worried      | e. safeguard    |
| 6. lead to      | f. concerned    |
| 7. problems     | g. dropped      |
| 8. author       | h. result in    |
| 9. stop         | i. writer       |
| 10. protect     | j. vanishing    |

## Discussion – Student A

- What's your favourite insect?
- What do you think of the fact that so many insects have gone?
- Why could it be dangerous if many insects disappear?
- How useful are ants?
- Should governments start projects to increase insect numbers?
- Why would global warming harm insects?
- What insect do you dislike most?
- Why are many people afraid of insects?

## Phrase Match

- |                                     |                              |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. fallen by 45 per cent            | a. insects has nearly halved |
| 2. It says the human population has | b. warming                   |
| 3. the number of                    | c. diseases with them        |
| 4. Another reason is global         | d. doubled since 1980        |
| 5. worried about the                | e. for survival              |
| 6. fewer insects to pollinate       | f. in the past 35 years      |
| 7. farmers will have problems       | g. the helpful insects       |
| 8. move to cities and bring         | h. growing food              |
| 9. losing in the fight              | i. disappearance of bees     |
| 10. help us to protect              | j. flowers                   |

## Discussion – Student B

- Do you kill an insect if one is in your house?
- Should children learn more about how important insects are?
- Why aren't governments doing more to protect animals?
- What would you do if there were lots of rats in your area?
- What are the most useful insects in the world?
- Spiders are not insects. Why not?
- What would happen to the world if all the bugs died?
- What questions would you like to ask an insect expert?

## Spelling

- sescitsitn say this could be dangerous
- dpbhueisl in the journal 'Science'
- the human population has elbodud
- the number of insects has nearly elvhad
- Another aneros is global warming
- worried about the darcenaepsip of bees
- the ceeilnd in insect populations
- fewer insects to tpaleilno flowers
- The lead tarhou of the report
- lead to more sdesaie in humans
- what csepsie are winning and losing
- help us to oretptc the "helpful" insects

### Answers – Synonym Match

1. g	2. d	3. j	4. b	5. f
6. h	7. a	8. i	9. c	10. e

## Role Play

### Role A – Ants

You think ants are the most important bugs. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their bug isn't so interesting. Also, tell the others which is the least useful of these (and why): spiders, butterflies or bees.

### Role B – Spiders

You think spiders are the most important bugs. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their bug isn't so interesting. Also, tell the others which is the least useful of these (and why): ants, butterflies or bees.

### Role C – Butterflies

You think butterflies are the most important bugs. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their bug isn't so interesting. Also, tell the others which is the least useful of these (and why): spiders, ants or bees.

### Role D – Bees

You think bees are the most important bugs. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their bug isn't so interesting. Also, tell the others which is the least useful of these (and why): spiders, butterflies or ants.

## Speaking – Favourites

Rank these with your partner. Put your favourite insects at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- |                |                        |
|----------------|------------------------|
| • bees         | • ants                 |
| • dragonflies  | • spiders              |
| • worms        | • ladybirds (ladybugs) |
| • grasshoppers | • butterflies          |

### Answers – True False

a	F	b	F	c	T	d	T	e	T	f	F	g	F	h	T
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.