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And He Saw That It Was Good: the Honeybee

By Elizabeth Johnstone

Stemming from a grassroots movement to raise awareness about the beekeeping industry, National Honeybee Day celebrates its twelfth anniversary on August 21. Before its first recognition in 2009, it was only known among America's beekeepers, mirroring the public sentiment around the honeybee itself. Its buzz stayed out of the public's ears until 2010, when National Honeybee Day became a non-profit organization and marginally increased in recognition ([Manuka Honey](#)). Today, while the holiday has gained more popularity since 2009, the general sentiment around the honeybee is still lukewarm despite the species's dire endangerment in America.



The average honeybee worker sits at just half an inch, about the size of a paperclip. They live for up to five years in a hive in three classes: the queen that births the colony, the female workers that maintain the hive, and the male drones that potentially mate with queens ([National Geographic](#); [Perfect Bee](#)). Most importantly, they are one of the only bee species to produce honey, and the only species of bee with such a large-scale honey operation—a perfect target for greedy humans.

People have cultivated honey from bees for over 10,000 years, as even early myths speak of it as a “mystical nectar of the gods” ([Danovich](#)). Before the widespread use of cane sugar and artificial sweeteners, honey was the sweetest food to most civilizations, but procurement of it proved disastrous to bees. However, in the mid 1800s, American minister Lorenzo Langstroth developed the modern beehive that would allow honey to be farmed while preserving the bees' habitats. Today, honey is a household item, and it is even used in the medical field to treat eye and throat diseases, dizziness and fatigue, hepatitis, eczema, ulcers, and much more ([Ediriweera et. al](#)).

Moreover, honeybees uphold the agricultural industrial complex as the most prevalent pollinators. 80% of crops rely specifically on honeybees, including: apples, pears, various species of bean, strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, and many more ([Sustain](#); [Hung et. al](#)). While some birds, insects, and other bees pollinate crops, honeybees do most of the heavy lifting, fertilizing most fields in the United States ([Three Foragers](#)).

Although we rely on honeybees for food and health every day, they are currently experiencing the devastating effects of us humans. Bees are constantly battling pesticides, fungi and mite infestations, global warming, natural disasters, and other climate change-induced catastrophes ([Karma Honey Project](#)). The good news is that there are various organizations that fight to protect the honeybee. The [World Wildlife Foundation](#) and [Heifer International](#) allow you to figuratively adopt a bee and accept donations to help bees worldwide, respectively. [Help the Bees](#) and



[Project Honeybees](#) offer art pieces and jewelry and send all proceeds to bee conservation. If you aren't in a position to donate, the [Bee Conservancy](#) offers ten ways to help bees locally, including planting a bee garden in a space as small as a window box!

While it may be so easy to overlook these small insects, honeybees are one of the most important insects to our society. So take some time to give back to the bees this year and make a buzz about National Honeybee Day!