



# News

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## Bee Wars: an unspoken conflict



1968 views

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Tuesday, October 21, 2014, 12:05 PM - While bees have been getting plenty of attention in the media for their quickly diminishing population, a new study sheds light on a rather undocumented behaviour.

Pairs of bee colonies in Australia are at war with each other over control of a single hive. Different groups send waves of worker bees that battle each other and die. These conflicts go on for months and often end with the attacking swarm taking over and usurping the throne with their own queen.

The study was published in American Naturalist and was led by Dr. Paul Cunningham from the Queensland University of Technology.

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Cunningham told BBC News that when you stand under the battling swarms you can actually see the dying bees falling to the ground. In some cases, bees hold onto each other and die together.

The front line in these wars are the worker bees—who until recently were only known for making honey but are also apparently fierce warriors.

Dr. Cunningham studied 260 hives in Australia and found that 46 saw a change in power at one point. The queen in charge was the genetic daughter of the invading hive's queen.

But is this the first time bee's display questionable behaviour? Not even close. Robber bees in South America "starve" out the competition by stealing honey and other resources. In Brazil, Robber bees have wiped out 50 per cent of the nests of another species of bee.



 **Mariette DiChristina**  
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You can see queen bee with white spot painted on her. Museum of Science, Boston.

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