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Light pollution linked to insect loss – 28th August, 2021

Level 4

Street lights could be causing a decline in insect numbers. Researchers in the UK carried out studies on the number of insects living near white light from LEDs. The researchers said the LEDs affected insect behaviour. The lead researcher said he was surprised at how much LEDs affected insects. He found a 47 per cent reduction in insects near lit hedgerow test sites and a 37 per cent reduction near lit roadside grassy areas.

Researchers set up LEDs at 26 roadside sites that contained hedges or grassy areas. They counted the number of caterpillars at these sites and compared this with insects found at unlit sites. A researcher said the difference was "stark". He said the lights stopped female insects laying eggs in the lit areas. In addition, artificial lighting disturbed what insects ate, so the caterpillars in the unlit areas were heavier.

Level 5

Street lights and other forms of artificial lighting could be causing a decline in insects. Researchers from the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology conducted studies on the number of insects living near sources of white light from LEDs. The researchers said LEDs are disrupting insect behaviour and causing a fall in their numbers. The lead researcher said the results of his study were "eye-opening". He was surprised at how much LEDs affected the number of insects. He found a 47 per cent reduction in insects near hedgerow test sites and a 37 per cent reduction near roadside grassy areas.

Researchers set up LEDs at 26 roadside sites in the countryside that contained hedges or grassy areas. They counted the numbers of moth caterpillars found at these sites and compared these with insects found at unlit sites. A researcher said: "We were really quite taken aback by just how stark [the difference] was." He suggested that LEDs caused two drastic changes in behaviour. He said the lights stopped female insects laying eggs in the lit areas. In addition, artificial lighting disturbed the feeding behaviour of the insects, so the caterpillars in the unlit areas were heavier.

Level 6

Scientists have discovered that street lights and other forms of artificial lighting could be behind a decline in insect populations. Researchers from the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology conducted studies on the number of insects living near sources of white light from light-emitting diodes (LEDs). The researchers said LEDs are responsible for disrupting insect behaviour and for causing a drop in their numbers. Lead researcher Douglas Boyes said the results of his study were "eye-opening". He was surprised at the extent of the insect loss due to LEDs. He found a 47 per cent reduction in insect populations at hedgerow test sites and a 37 per cent reduction at roadside grassy areas.

Mr Boyes and his team set up LEDs at 26 roadside sites in the countryside that contained either hedges or grass verges. The researchers counted the numbers of moth caterpillars found at these sites and compared these with insects found at unlit sites. Boyes commented on the difference. He said: "We were really quite taken aback by just how stark it was." He posited that LEDs led to two drastic changes in behaviour. He said the most alarming discovery was that the lights stopped female insects laying eggs in the lit areas. Another disruption was that the lighting disturbed the feeding behaviour of the insects. The caterpillars in the unlit areas were heavier than those in the areas lit by LEDs.