The Varroa mite, *Varroa destructor*, is the most serious threat to the western honeybee, *Apis mellifera*. Varroa is a parasite that feeds on the bee and spreads viruses. Untreated, colonies die in a few years.

**Varroa Impact**

Varroa spread viruses and amplify their effects. Deformed Wing Virus (DWV) is a typical sign of Varroa infestation. Other viruses, once thought insignificant, are also killing bees.

Female varroa lay their eggs in brood cells, especially drone brood cells. They feed off developing bees and impair normal growth.

**Global Spread**

Since the early 1900s varroa has spread throughout the world. By 2016, Australia, one of very few countries that appeared to be varroa-free, seemed under threat.

**Apiary spread**

Varroa mites attach themselves to flying bees and spread with robber bees, drifting bees, swarms and migratory beekeeping. Varroa infiltrate colonies by mimicking the scents of bees. They even know when colony collapse is imminent and leave with the absconding bees to infest another colony.

**Treatment, IPM and resistance**

Varroa cannot be eliminated, but numbers can be controlled using effective and approved treatments that are safe for bees, honey, humans and the environment. Overuse of single treatments accelerates resistance, so alternating treatments with Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is essential.

**Timeline**

- **1904**: Leaves Java as *Varroa jacobsoni*
- **1960s**: Discovered in USSR
- **1970s**: Discovered in Europe
- **1980s**: First generation treatments eg *Apistan*
- **1987**: Discovered in USA
- **1992**: Discovered in Britain
- **1996**: Role of viruses in Varroa impact released
- **1999**: Second generation treatments eg *Apiguard*
- **2000**: Varroa destructor recognized as different species to *Varroa jacobsoni*
- **2000**: Discovered in New Zealand

**Data source:** Atter Webster TC, Delaplane KS 2001, Mites of the Honey Bee