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Bees under Threat (a very good reason to keep bees!)

Unfortunately today our native 'black bees' (Apis mellifera mellifera) are under a lot of pressure from diseases and modern agri-technology practices. The main reason is of course man's activities, in particular the un-natural movement of bees around the world and the ever-increasing use of crop protection chemicals and agents in the food production industries. The affect has been introduction of disease and pests that our native bees can not cope with, and slow but very noticeable change in neuro - physiological behaviour. The result is devastating effects on the normal bee life cycles and behaviours, particularly their reproduction and fertility levels, and geographical location abilities, all so essential to their existence.



While beekeepers can work with 'hived' bees and the various organisations to redress these issues, there is little we can do to aid the wild and native colonies of bees that are being affected besides ensuring that 'hived' colonies are healthy ones and that there are enough numbers to supplement wild losses. Research is going on to monitor feral (wild) bee populations to identify if a natural genetic resistance to the Varroa problem exists. See the Dunblane BKA website for details .



About the EMBA...

The history of EMBA has inextricable links to the Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland, the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh, and the Scottish Beekeepers Association . See www.edinburghbeekeepers.org.uk for more info

Formerly The Edinburgh Green Belt Trust

SUPPORTED BY: Scottish Natural Heritage, City of Edinburgh Council, Cairn Energy, The Scottish Government's Third Sector Enterprise Fund
The Edinburgh & Lothians Greenspace Trust is recognised as a Scottish Charity no. SC018196 and is a company limited by guarantee
No. SC132480. VAT registration no. 917721713
REGISTERED OFFICE: Lindsays WS, Caledonian Exchange, 19A Canning Street, Edinburgh EH3 8HE
A member of Greenspace Scotland



With Peter Steven, EMBA,
Edinburgh & Midlothian Beekeepers Association

Beekeeping for Beginners

109/11 Swanston Road, Edinburgh,
Saturday 31st July 2010, 10am



Beekeeping for Beginners



The art of beekeeping and honey production has been around for many years, in fact it has been around for thousands of years as evidenced by rock paintings reckoned to be older than 10,000 BC. Ancient Egyptians were particularly adept at the art and were recorded as such in the writings of Virgil, Gaius Julius Hyginus, Varro and Columella.



Traditionally beekeeping was carried out for honey production, but nowadays other aspects of natural bee services are utilised such as all important crop pollination. Other useful hive products are pollen, royal jelly and propolis, which are also used for nutritional and medicinal purposes, and wax which is used in candlemaking, cosmetics, wood polish and for modelling, bee venom is used by therapists as an effective treatment of rheumatic diseases.

In the wild our native honeybees (*Apis mellifera mellifera*) live in natural cavities such as holes in old mature trees, and also in walls, roof spaces and anywhere else that provides a secure watertight home where they can reproduce and store honey for the winter months. Honeybees also live happily in hives (artificial homes) provided by beekeepers, whose role is now an important part of conserving populations of this important pollinator species.

Beekeepers

Beekeepers come in three different varieties:

The Hobbyist - Beekeeping for pleasure as just a hobby.

The Amateur - More than a hobbyist, looking for a bit extra money.

The Commercial - Beekeeping as a main source of income.



Modern beekeepers whether hobbyist or commercial all tend to be members of local and national associations where news, events, techniques and best practice are exchanged.

Beekeeping Equipment

Is beekeeping an expensive hobby? No, in comparison to other hobbies it is relatively inexpensive. The equipment needed has a long lifespan and is often acquired second hand from retiring beekeepers. A complete new hive costs less than a reasonable bicycle. Here is a list of the basics.



The Hive - Beekeepers normally keep their colonies in a hive, which is a set of wooden boxes filled with frames that each hold a sheet of wax foundation. The bottom box, or brood chamber, contains the queen and most of the bees; the upper boxes, or supers, contain just honey. The bees produce wax and build honeycomb using the wax foundation sheets as a starting point, after which they may raise brood or deposit honey and pollen in the cells of the comb. These frames can be freely manipulated and honey supers with frames full of honey can be taken and extracted for their honey crop. There are various designs of this moveable frame hive in use today.

Protective clothing - Beekeepers usually wear protective clothing such as gloves and a hooded suit or hat and veil. Experienced beekeepers rarely use gloves because they make movement clumsy and can transmit disease from one hive to another. The face and neck are the most important areas to protect, so most beekeepers will at least wear a veil.

Smoker - A necessary line of defence; protective clothing provides remarkably little protection from agitated bees. Most beekeepers use a "smoker" - a device designed to generate smoke that can be directed into the beehive. The bees are calmed with a puff of smoke, triggering a feeding response in anticipation of possible hive abandonment due to fire and masking any alarm pheromones. The ensuing confusion creates an opportunity for the beekeeper to open the hive and work without triggering a large defensive reaction from the occupants. Also, the bee's abdomen distends from the honey consumed and it becomes difficult to make the necessary flexes to sting.

