



The British Beekeepers' Association

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TEN THINGS TO DO TO HELP HONEY BEES

Honey bees across the world under threat because of virulent viruses transferred by the varroa mite. Nearly all colonies in the wild have died out and without beekeepers to care for them honey bees could disappear in a few years.

Dr Ivor Davis, Master Beekeeper and trustee of the British Beekeepers Association suggests ten things which everyone can do to help preserve our honey bees.

1. Ask your MP and MEP to lobby for more funds for bee health research

Beekeepers are worried that not enough is known to combat the diseases that affect honey bees. Bee pollination contributes £165 million to the agricultural economy. The BBKA has costed a five-year £8 million programme to secure the information to save our bees. During this period, honey bee pollination will contribute more than £800 million to the government coffers – yet the government only spends £200,000 annually on honey bee research. Even a former DEFRA Minister, who's Department holds the purse strings to finance this, has said without this extra research we could lose our honey bees within 10 years. Write to your MP or MEP to support The Bee Health Research Funding Campaign. Campaign details are on www.britishbee.org.uk

2. Plant bee friendly plants

Where there are few agricultural crops, honey bees rely upon garden flowers for a diverse diet of nectar and pollen. Encourage honey bees to visit your garden by planting single flowering plants and vegetables. Go for the allium family, all the mints, beans and flowering herbs. Bees like daisy shaped flowers - asters and sunflowers, also tall plants- hollyhocks, larkspur and foxgloves. www.britishbee.org.uk has leaflets on bee-friendly trees and shrubs.

3. Join the beekeepers

Beekeeping is an enjoyable, fascinating and interesting hobby – and you get to eat your own honey too. Local beekeeping associations run courses every year to help new people to take up beekeeping, find the equipment they need and a colony of bees. They welcome people interested in beekeeping to observe apiary meetings in the summer. Programmes allow enthusiasts to become Master Beekeepers. For information visit the British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA) web site www.britishbee.org.uk

4. Find space for beehives

Many would- be beekeepers, especially in urban areas, find it difficult to find a safe space for their colony of bees. If you have some space in your garden, or know some who has, contact your local beekeeping association and they could find a beekeeper in need of a site. It is amazing what a difference a beehive will make in a garden. Crops of peas and beans will be better, fruit trees will crop well with un-deformed fruit and your garden will be buzzing!

5. Buy local honey if you can

Buying local honey helps local beekeepers to cover costs of protecting bees. Local honey is processed naturally and complies with all food standards requirements without damage to the honey. It tastes different to foreign supermarket honey and has a flavour that reflects local flora.

6. Do not keep unwashed honey jars outside the back door

Believe it or not but honey brought from overseas can contain bacteria and spores that are very harmful to honey bees. If you leave a jar outside it encourages honey bees to feed on the remaining honey. There is a good possibility that this will infect the bee who will infect the rest of the colony resulting in death of the colony. Always wash out honey jars and dispose of them carefully.

7. Bee friendly

When kept properly, bees are good neighbours, and only sting when provoked. Beekeepers wear protective clothing when they are handling bees. If a bee hovers inquiringly in front of you when unprotected, do NOT flap your hands. Stay calm and move slowly away, best into the shade of shed or a tree. The bee will soon lose interest. It is worth remembering that bees do not like the smell of alcohol on people, the 'animal' smell of leather clothing, even watchstraps. Bees regard dark clothing as a threat – it could be a bear! Bees are sometimes confused by scented soaps, shampoos and perfumes, best avoided near the hive.

8. Protect swarms

Swarming is the natural process by which colonies of honey bees increase their numbers. If you see a swarm contact the local authority or the police - they will contact a local beekeeper to collect the swarm. Honey bees in a swarm are usually very gentle and present very little danger. They can be made aggressive if disturbed or sprayed with water. Just leave them alone and wait for a competent beekeeper to arrive.

9. Encourage local authorities to use bee friendly plants in public spaces

Some of the UK's best gardens and open spaces are managed by local authorities. Many recognise the value of planning gardens, roundabouts and other areas with flowers that attract bees. Encourage your authority to improve the area you live in by adventurous planting schemes, and offer to help look after them if resources are in short supply

10. Learn more about this fascinating insect

Beekeeping is fascinating. Honeybees have been on this earth for about 25 million years and are ideally adapted to their natural environment. Without honey bees the environment would be dramatically diminished. Invite a beekeeper to come and talk to any local group you support and give an illustrated talk about the honey bee and the products of the hive. They might bring honey too. Honey bees are a part of our folklore and are one of only two insect species that are managed to provide us with essential services

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