

Honey Bee Information Sheet



Name

The scientific name for the western honey bee is *Apis mellifera*. *Apis* is the Latin word for bee, and *mellifera* means honey-bearing, referring to the species' production of honey.

Traditions

Folk tales in Scotland and England state that bees would hum loudly at midnight on Christmas Day for the birth of Jesus Christ. When the new Gregorian calendar was adopted in 1752, 11 days were removed and the fact that the bees could not be heard humming on the new Christmas Day was taken as a sign of God's displeasure at the changes!

For centuries, beekeepers across Europe have kept up this incredibly ancient tradition of honeybees being messengers through "telling the bees".

This is where the beekeeper treated their bees as extended members of their own family and kept informed of any family news in the household. Beekeepers also needed to talk to the bees in calm voices and never use harsh words for fear of upsetting the bees.

Marriages, births and especially deaths were marked by decorating the hive and telling the bees what had happened. The death of the beekeeper required the new beekeeper to introduce themselves formally as their new owner and ask for their acceptance as their new master/mistress. It was said that not doing this would encourage the bees to desert the hive or the colony to stop producing honey or even die.

Funders and partner organisations

Green Recovery Challenge Fund



The National Lottery Heritage Fund



Leicester City Council



Erasmus+



LUND UNIVERSITY



Naturskolan i Lund



LUNDS KOMMUN

Sayings

There are a lot of sayings about bees!

In Spain:

- “Nadie se llame colmenero si no lleva sus abejas al romero” (No one is called a beekeeper if he does not take his bees to Rosemary)
- “Si quieres miel no des puntapiés sobre la colmena” (If you want honey don’t kick the hive)

Maltese proverbs and idioms about bees and honey:

- “bieżel daqs naħla” (as busy as a bee)
- “Iddur kemm iddur, in-naħla lejn l-għasel tmur” (The bee always ends going towards the honey) – everyone seeks one’s own interests
- “niżel għasel” (I enjoyed eating it as if it were honey)
- “Hobż tax-xgħir, għasel f’dar il-fqir” (Barley bread is like honey for a poor household)

Some examples from the UK:

- “a bee in one’s bonnet” meaning to have an obsession with something
- “bee’s knees” referring to something that is impressive, or desirable
- “queen bee” referring to a woman who has a certain amount of authority in a group of people



History

In ancient times, and especially during the Roman period, Malta was renowned for the superior quality of honey it produced. The name 'Malta' may be derived from Greek word 'meli' which means honey.

Ancient stone apiaries, some dating back to the Roman rule in Malta, can still be seen in some localities of the Maltese archipelago. Locally these were called mighħa.



Food and medicine

Tooth decay was relatively common in Malta's neolithic communities, even among children. Archeologists attribute this to the high consumption of honey in their diets.

Honey is one of the richest products of our gastronomy thanks to its taste, its smell but above all thanks to the many beneficial properties it has for our health. It was extensively used in the production of desserts in Malta especially before the introduction of sugar. One such dessert is Qagħaq tal-Għasel (Honey Rings), traditionally served during Christmas.



Honey mixed with warm water and some lemon drops was and is still used to sooth sore throats and to relieve the symptoms of common colds.

Bees are important

Nature needs bees, and so do humans. We may take them and other pollinators like butterflies and hoverflies for granted, but they are vital to stable, healthy food supplies and key to the varied, colourful and nutritious diets we need (and have come to expect).

Bees are perfectly adapted to pollinate, helping plants grow, breed and produce food. They do so by transferring pollen between flowering plants and therefore keeping the cycle of life turning.

The vast majority of plants we need for food rely on pollination, especially by bees: from almonds and vanilla to apples and squash. Bees also pollinate around 80% of wildflowers in Europe, so our countryside would be far less interesting and beautiful without them.

By keeping the cycle of life turning, bees boost the colour and beauty of our countryside. Some 80% of European wildflowers require insect pollination. Many of them such as foxglove, clovers and vetches rely on bees.

How to attract bees to your garden

1. Plant a bee garden – by planting a bee garden, you can create a habitat corridor with plants that are rich in pollen and nectar. You don't need a ton of space to grow bee-friendly plants. Gardens can be established across yards and in window boxes, flower pots, and planters.

2. Provide trees for bees – when a tree blooms, it provides hundreds of blossoms to feed from. Trees are not only a great food source for bees, but also an essential habitat. Tree leaves and resin provide nesting material for bees, while natural wood cavities make excellent shelters.

3. Create a bee bath – bees work up quite a thirst foraging and collecting nectar. Fill a shallow bird bath or bowl with clean water, and arrange pebbles and stones inside so that they break the water's surface. Bees will land on the stones and pebbles to take a long, refreshing drink.

4. Build homes for native bees – most bees live a solitary life, and about two-thirds of them build underground nests. Species like bumble bees build their nests in undisturbed land, and you can provide safe haven for them by leaving an untouched plot of land for them in your garden!

