

Feeding bees – water

Background

Water is essential for honey bee colonies to process stores, make brood food, maintain humidity, to ensure that eggs hatch, etc., and also for cooling the colony in hot weather. It is not stored in the hive, although 'reservoir bees' will be carrying it in their honey sacs.



Tips on providing water

- It is notable that feral honeybee colonies tend to follow water courses when they swarm indicating the importance of water to them.
- Apiary sites need to be assessed for the availability of suitable water. Many public complaints are made because of bees obtaining water from swimming pools, garden ponds, drying washing, etc., especially during dry periods.
- If bees do not have adequate natural supplies, then provide a supply by using a water feeder. Entrance-type feeders available from equipment suppliers can be adapted, but a communal site away from the immediate apiary may be more suitable. It will be necessary to make your own, and instructions can be found in some beekeeping text books and on the internet.
- If making your own water feeder remember that it is the natural inclination of bees to suck up moisture from a wet surface such as soil, sand or brick rather than from an open water surface. An area of about 75 cm². or 12 in² per colony is required at times of dearth. Do not permit the moisture to become stagnant. The landing area needs to be greater than the watering area.
- Bees have a preference for water that is warmer than 18°C and also for urine to which, like other insects, they are attracted by the salts contained.
- When first supplying water, add a little salt to encourage the bees to use it.
- If bees are using an open water source, such as a water butt, put floats on the surface for the bees to use so as to prevent bees drowning.
- If bees are contained in hives for long distance transport or during crop spraying in hot conditions they may require a supply of water to prevent overheating. A contact feeder filled with water and placed over a feed hole can provide this.



This leaflet was produced as part of the Healthy Bees Plan. The Healthy Bees Plan aims to address the challenges facing beekeepers in sustaining the health of honey bees and beekeeping in England and Wales. It has been jointly developed by Governments, beekeepers, their associations and other stakeholders.

For more information on the Healthy Bees Plan visit:

<http://www.fera.defra.gov.uk/healthybeesplan>



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