

Harrow Beekeepers' Association: Guidance for keeping bees on allotments

HONEY BEES - What are they? - What do they do?

Honey bees are insects that have been on Earth for about 100 million years, well before any humans.

Bees thrived without the help of man and still do in some parts of the world. At the beginning of the 20th century disease caused the demise of the native strain of black bee in England.

Since 1992, when the varroa mite entered southern England from the Continent, bees in the UK have become more dependant on man. The varroa infestation has moved northwards and colonies in hives can only survive if they are treated to combat varroa. Wild honey bee colonies die out but bumble bees are not affected.

The main function of honey bees is as pollinators. They are of immense value to agriculture, horticulture and gardeners and are responsible for the pollination of crops estimated to have a value of £7 billion per year. Government ministers and other officers have shown their ignorance of this fact on many occasions and have dismissed bees and beekeeping as insignificant.

Siting beehives and handling bees on allotments

Things to do

Try to arrange for hives to be sited in a remote area of the allotment(s) away from other plot holders.

Limit the number of colonies to the appropriate number for the area.

Ensure that bees are encouraged to rise in excess of 6 feet before leaving the plot by the use of screening which could be natural hedging, wooden fencing or fine plastic / wire mesh screening. Ensure that the flight path (of low flying bees) is not directly across other plots.

Handling bees should be done at times when the bees are very active, thus leaving fewer in the hive.

Keep bees from a good-tempered strain.

Always ensure there is someone else on site in case of emergency when handling bees.

Or carry a mobile phone.

Things NOT to do

Do not place hives in positions from which flight paths impinge on other allotment users or pathways.

Do not allow inexperienced beekeepers to keep colonies of bees on the allotment without ensuring that the novice will have the benefit of guidance by an experienced beekeeper

Do not handle bees when other people are gardening in the immediate vicinity.

Do not allow the strength of colonies to increase to swarming strength in an unmanaged way.

Management Policy / Criteria

A person wishing to keep bees on allotments must first seek the agreement of the Local Council and Allotment site Managers, who require the beekeeper to be a member of the local beekeeping Association that provides third party insurance.

He/she must abide by any allotment rules stipulated.

Harrow Beekeepers Association and the Local Council will work together to resolve any problems.

Failure to follow the above conditions could result in the beekeeper being asked to remove their bees from the allotment site.

Harrow Beekeepers Association contact, John House 0208 868-8174.