

Honey Bees in Our Neighbourhood

Dear neighbour,

You may have seen honey bees flying through your yard and in your flowers. That's because we're keeping honey bees in our yard. We'd like to tell you some things about our honey bees.



A honey bee in goldenrod flowers.

- ❖ They are related to bumble bees and wasps (yellow jackets). However, they are not aggressive the way that wasps are. They do not hang around your barbeque and picnic table trying to chew on the steak. Honey bees collect nectar and pollen from flowers. Our bees also get water from a tiny brook on the property and resin from trees.
- ❖ A family of honey bees is called a "colony" and they nest in hollow trees or

human-made dwellings called "hives." There may be as many as 60,000 bees in a hive in early July.

- ❖ There are three "castes" of honey bees — the queen, female workers, and male drones. It is the workers that you will see around your yard.



This is a wasp (yellow jacket) not a honey bee.

- ❖ Honey bees get their energy from the sugars in nectar and their protein from pollen in flowers. The pollen is made into "bee bread" to feed to their young. They need water to survive just like humans, but it's also used to cool the hive when it's really hot. The resin is made into something called "propolis" which is a kind of glue or coating used to seal up and sterilize the inside of the hive.
- ❖ Most people are surprised to learn that the inclination to sting is absent when bees are not near their hives. Bees foraging on flowers are totally friendly unless you grab them, step on them with bare feet, or swat at them. Bees will very aggressively defend their

hives if they are disturbed. Bees rarely sting within 30-90 feet of the hive unless they have been greatly disturbed at the hive.

- ❖ A worker bee lives about 5-6 weeks during the summer. During this time, it produces 1/12th teaspoon (5 drops) of honey.
- ❖ Bees from the same hive visit about 225,000 flowers a day. A bee has to visit about 2 million flowers to collect enough nectar to make 1 pound of honey.



A lawn covered with hawkweed flowers.

- ❖ Honey bees will travel up to 6 km when foraging. However, most of their foraging is less than 2 km from the hive.
- ❖ In our neighbourhood, honey bees get most of their nectar and pollen from **coltsfoot (along the side of the roads in early May)**, maple tree flowers, hawkweed, dandelions, clover, fireweed, goldenrod, and bog aster. Alder and pussy willow are important for pollen early in the spring.



A honey bee approaches a fireweed flower.

- ❖ Honey bees are excellent pollinators. That's why they are used to pollinate the almond orchards in California. You should get more fruit on your apple trees, raspberries, and strawberries because of the honey bees in the neighbourhood.
- ❖ An estimated 35% of the world's food supply is dependent on pollination by honey bees, wild pollinators like bumble bees and nectar-feeding bats, and other species.

NL is a special place

There are currently less than 50 beekeepers in the province keeping about 500 colonies. Five or six people are commercial operators selling honey, wax candles, cosmetics, and other products but the rest are hobby beekeepers. We have a beekeeping association where you can get information about honey bees (www.nlbeekeeping.ca).

With the exception of Newfoundland and Labrador, North America is plagued with pests

and diseases that have been killing off honey bees in large numbers. The worst of these is a small vampire mite called varroa. The parasite kills bees by sucking their blood and by injecting a cocktail of nasty viruses into them.



A varroa mite on a bee. Imagine having a bloodsucking creature the size of a grapefruit stuck on your side!

We beekeepers are determined to keep varroa and other bee pests and diseases out of the province which is why we strongly support provincial government import restrictions on bees and rigorous monitoring.

Our biggest challenges

Despite not having varroa and a number of other pests and diseases, NL does have big challenges for beekeepers. The biggest are the weather in the spring and our short growing season! As you know May and June can be very dirty months with lots of cold and rain. This is not good weather for our bees which need at least 8-12 degrees C. and sunshine to fly in search of nectar and pollen.



Getting the grandchildren into it...

Our beekeeping

Our current goal is to keep [x no.] "production colonies" in order to get as much honey as possible. We may pasture a couple of colonies elsewhere because the flowers in the neighbourhood may not support four colonies for full honey production. Time will tell...

Swarms

Honey bees reproduce by swarming, when the queen flies off with several thousand workers to establish a new nest. This is most likely in June or July if the queen runs out of egg-laying space in the hive. Swarms are rare and are nothing to be feared. The workers in a swarm are docile because they are loaded with honey. We have "swarm traps" in place to encourage swarm bees to nest there.

If you have any questions about this or spot a swarm (for example, a large cluster of bees on a tree branch) please contact me – your name, 709-xxx-xxx, name@emailaddress