

# Honey Bees

several species of genus *Apis*



Honeybees have long provided humans with honey and beeswax. Such commercial uses have gradually led to a large beekeeping industry, though many species still occur in the wild.

Pollination of crops remains one of the most important eco services for our food industry and effects of bee decline can be already observed in many countries. For example, apple orchards in China have to be hand-pollinated. They are also already working on creating a “robotic bee” in Harvard.

There are currently 7 recognised species of honey bee, with only one of them being native to Ireland – the Irish Dark Native Honey Bee (*Apis mellifera mellifera*).

The Colony or swarm is the collective name for all the bees in the nest or hive. Its size varies depending on the time of year; it is at its smallest from November to February and its largest between June and August.

A hive’s inhabitants are generally divided into 3 types:

- Workers are the only bees that most people ever see. These bees are females that are not sexually developed. Workers forage for pollen and nectar, build, protect and clean the hive.
- The queen’s job is simple – it is up to her to lay the eggs that will produce the hive’s next generation of bees.
- Male bees are called drones. Several hundred drones live in each hive during the spring and summer but are forced to leave for the winter months when the hive goes into survival mode.

Honeybees can survive up to 5 years in the wild.

In Ancient Ireland, the management of bees was universally understood and many householders kept

hives in their gardens. Wild bees, too, swarmed everywhere – much more plentifully than at present, on account of the extent of woodland. Before cane-sugar came into general use (c. 16th century), the bee industry was considered so important that a special section of the Brehon Laws is devoted to it.

The European Commission has proposed a ban on the use of bee-harming pesticides (neonicotinoids) for an initial 2 year period. This move is a step in the right direction to save our bees and ensure good food and good farming in Europe. During the first vote on this ban on March 15th 2013, no majority decision was reached by the national ministers for agriculture from the different EU member states. On 29th April, the ministers are set to vote again in an attempt to reach a final decision.

Ireland is set to confirm its position as bottom of the European environmental league if Minister for Agriculture Simon Coveney votes again next Monday in favour of continued use of 'neonicotinoid' insecticides...