



Nature Features

You are in: [Somerset](#) > [Nature](#) > [Nature Features](#) > 'Marvellous relaxation'

'Marvellous relaxation'

After two wet summers, beekeepers in Somerset are confident this year will bring in a honey 'bonanza' as a hot summer is forecast.



A beehive produces around 40lbs of honey

Beekeeping is seeing a resurgence in the county as more people take an interest in beekeeping and the role the honeybee plays in nature.

In the 1990's many local beekeepers lost their colonies because of the verova mite and the rainy summers of 2007 and 2008 resulted in very poor honey takes (harvests).

David Morris, publicity officer for the Somerset Beekeepers' Association said: "In the last two or three years because there are introductory courses run all over the county the numbers attending those have risen dramatically particularly this year. There was one in Shepton Mallet which had over 100, Taunton had 80 and similar reports in other areas."

'Virgin queen bee'

Although some people attend the sessions merely to learn about the art of beekeeping, some decide to have a go themselves.

Honey facts

Bees have to use 200lbs of honey and pollen themselves before they start storing surplus honey

On average a hive produces around 40lbs of honey a year

There are two different types of honey: multiflora and uniflora

"Quite a fair proportion - a third to nearly a half - say 'right we will have a go at this' and they start, which is a good sign, as new faces and younger people are what's required."

David Morris has been beekeeping for over 50 years and has three hives at the back of his garden.

The largest has up to 60,000 honey bees and is in honey production; the other two are in the process of being established with virgin queen bees.

"The big hive is in honey production, and I've taken eggs out of that one that does well and I've put eggs into these little colonies that I've made up and what they have done is raise queen cells from those eggs that I've put in and next week a new virgin queen will emerge and she will go off and mate and then I will have four new colonies to fill up the empty spaces with the queen I have selected from."

'Cabbages'

A hive containing around 60,000 bees can produce on average 30 to 40lbs of honey a year and is taken off from the hives twice a year.



Honey made by David Morris

"Bees have to use 200lbs of honey and pollen themselves before they start storing surplus honey because they need that amount to live on from day to day. There are two sources they use to create honey - oil seed rape which most beekeepers think tastes like cabbages, then there's the other one - which is fruit blossom.

"What we do with the oil seed rape (honey take) because it's a very smooth honey is later on in the year we will mix that with some of the later honeys, like the tree honey which can be a bit gritty, so the oil seed rape is used for blending - some people will eat oil seed rape honey but not me!"

There are two different types of honey: Uniflora comes from one flower i.e. oil seed rape and multiflora, which is made from various flowers and is all mixed in in the hive.

"In this country and on the continent is multiflora honey because you get all these different tastes coming in - that's what makes European and British honey far superior to anything else in the world we argue, because if you go to Canada there is a lot of oil seed rape, there's a lot of clover.

"If you go to America, there's a lot of uniflora because they move their hives for one particular crop all the time. If you go to New Zealand it's better because they use the orchards and they've got lots of clover and so New Zealand honey is more of a blended honey."

Honeycomb

Each hive contains several frames which are like small screens, called foundation, made out of beeswax.



Beeswax is used to make beehive frames

"Once they have filled up the cells with honey, they are capped with wax and when the nectar comes in it's 80 per cent water. Bees have to evaporate it off so it comes down to 20 per cent water and that is water. When the bees believe that is correct, they cap it over and that acts as a preservative."

At this stage, the beekeeper takes out the screens from the hives and takes off the honey while the honeycomb is melted down and reused to make new foundations.

Although most honey sold in shops is either creamed or runny honey, for David the best way to eat is it chunk honey, or cone honey.

"It tastes delicious, it's the natural way to have honey, straight out of the hive, not filtered, not treated, just as the bees put in there."

For David, beekeeping is an addictive pursuit.

"It's not too difficult, it's common sense that you need to spend at least 12 months with a beekeeper to see what they do and how they do it.

"Accept that you are going to make mistakes as in everything but it's something lot of people find relaxing. They open up the hive and watch what the colonies are doing so it's marvellous relaxation and the more they read the more fascinated they become about it."

If you are interested in learning about beekeeping click on the links to the right of this page to find out more.

last updated: 10/06/2009 at 14:44
created: 10/06/2009

On the rest of the web

- [Somerset Beekeepers Association](#)

The BBC is not responsible for the content of external websites

BBC Somerset, Broadcasting House, Park Street, Taunton, Somerset, TA1 4DA
switchboard: 01823 323956 | phone-ins: 0845 303 1566 | e-mail: somerset@bbc.co.uk

[About the BBC](#) | [Help](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy & Cookies Policy](#)