

Beekeeping at Buckfast Information Sheet



20p

The monks at the present abbey have been keeping bees for over a hundred years. Archaeological evidence has shown that the medieval Buckfast monks also kept bees.

Brother Adam, the Abbey's most famous beekeeper was in charge of them for over seventy years. He started with forty-five hives. Today there are over seven hundred - which in the height of summer may contain as many as sixteen million bees!

Brother Adam bred a special kind of honeybee called 'The Buckfast Bee'. Its workers are known to be a good honey producers.

THE · LIFE · OF · A · WORKER · BEE

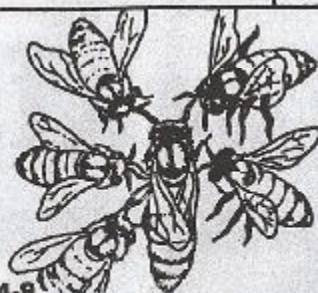
For the first 3 weeks of life the worker bee grows from an egg to a pupa inside the cell.

Days 1-3

After she comes out of the cell, the bee sets to work at once. For three days she becomes a nurse bee, cleaning the cells in which the queen will lay eggs.

Days 4-9

She looks after the larvae and helps to feed the queen.



Types of bee

Queen



Number in hive - 1

Drone



Number in hive - 500



Days 10-16

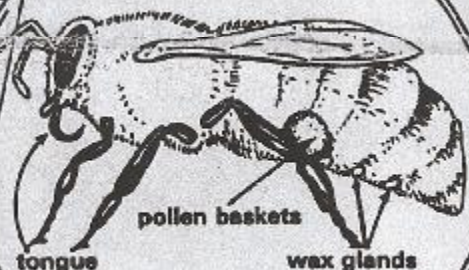
She uses beeswax from her own body to build honeycombs.



Days 17-19

She takes pollen and nectar, which the older bees have brought into the hive, and stores it in the combs.

Worker Bee



tongue

pollen baskets

wax glands

Average Number in hive - 22,500

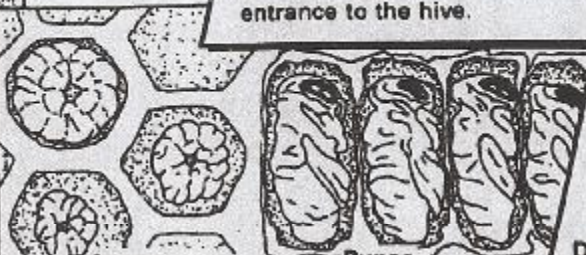
Nectar and Pollen

Bees eat both nectar and pollen. Nectar gives them carbohydrates and pollen gives them protein. Both are stored to be eaten later.



Day 20

She is a guard bee, protecting the entrance to the hive.



Larvae

Pupae

The larvae change into pupae and then into adult bees. The females become workers or queens depending on the food they are given.



Day 21

The bee leaves the hive and spends the rest of her life collecting pollen and nectar from flowers.

A worker bee may only live for four to six weeks in the summer. If she hatches just before the winter, however, she may live for six months in the hive.

FROM · FLOWER · TO · JAR

Where the honey comes from.



Clover



Heather

In spring the bees collect nectar from clover. In the summer the beekeeper takes them to Dartmoor to gather nectar from the heather.

How to collect honey without getting stung.



The beekeeper wears gloves and a hat with a veil, for protection. He is sometimes stung, though.



The beekeeper uses smoke to make the bees think their hive is on fire. They try to save the honey by eating it and this makes them sleepy, so they leave the beekeeper alone.

Taking the honey from the comb.



Hot Knife

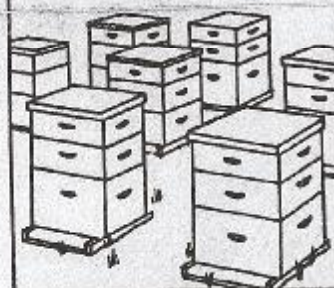
With a hot knife the beekeeper takes the caps off the honey cells. The combs are put into the honey extractor, which is a machine like a spin dryer.



As the extractor spins round, the honey is thrown on to the sides of the drum. Then it is put into jars.

A warm humid summer is needed for a lot of honey to be made. In the last 15 years less honey has been produced because the summers have been too wet, or too dry.

Winter Work.



Every winter the beekeeper cleans the hives. He sterilises them, repaints them and replaces old combs with new ones.



There has been a long tradition of beekeeping at Buckfast Abbey. Bee boles, shelves which held straw bee hives or skeps, have been found in the medieval enclosure wall which shows that bees were probably kept here by monks before the Dissolution in 1539.



Brother Adam

A Cistercian monastery stood at Buckfast until it was closed down by Henry VIII during the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539. The monks were forced to leave and the abbey fell into ruin. Part of the site was used as a farm.

In 1882 monks returned to Buckfast - and with them came the bees. Buckfast's most prominent beekeeper is Brother Adam. He looked after the bees for over seventy years and his name is known worldwide.

Adam was twelve when he came to Buckfast Abbey and within a few years he had been appointed by the abbot to help Brother Columban the beekeeper. Shortly after this 30 out of the abbey's 46 bee colonies were wiped out by a disease known as Acarine. All the bees that died were of the native British black bee variety. This bee was renowned for being hardy, but somewhat ill-tempered. The bees that survived the outbreak were all of Italian origin.

In 1919 Brother Columban retired and Brother Adam was put in sole charge of the bees, and he set about rebuilding the colonies. His intention was to use cross-breeding to develop a new bee which would be hardy like the black bee, but disease-resistant like the Italian bee, and a good honey producer. He wished to combine the best qualities from different

species to get a bee which would give the beekeeper maximum crop with the minimum of work. Many improvements had previously been made in beekeeping practice and technology; but Brother Adam wanted to actually change the bees themselves.

Brother Adam made extensive journeys all over the world, to get breeding stock. He visited all countries with a distinct indigenous race of bees going chiefly to isolated country areas where the purity of the native strains had been maintained. He even went to the Sahara Desert. Over the years he travelled more than 100,000 miles in search of bees.

The result of all these travels, and many years of patient experiment at the breeding station on Dartmoor, was the 'Buckfast bee'. This bee is a good pollen gatherer, and is normally gentle. It also has a lower tendency to swarm than many other varieties, and is resistant to disease. Buckfast queens are now kept by beekeepers all over the world.

Brother Adam wrote four books about the Buckfast bee, including 'In Search of the Best Strains of Bees' (1983) and 'Beekeeping at Buckfast' (1975). In 1974 he was awarded the O.B.E. for his work.

Brother Adam died in September 1996.



