

Bees and Neighbours



Beekeeping is a wonderful hobby. Bees are interesting creatures, with a fascinating life. Unfortunately, not every one appreciates this and, unless care is taken in keeping bees and siting colonies, trouble can result.

Stings

The only fact about bees that most people seem to know is that they sting. The closer a person is to an active colony, the more likely they are to be stung. The possibility of non-beekeepers being stung is reduced if:

- bees are not kept in small gardens or close to houses;
- the bees kept are known to be docile;
- manipulation of colonies is performed whilst neighbours are at work;
- colonies are kept in sheltered apiaries behind naturally high barriers

Drinking Bees

Bees need to drink like any other creature. Non-beekeepers can view this harmless activity with alarm since bees often choose to drink from places like the edges of ornamental ponds. The beekeeper can help by providing water for his bees. The simplest way to do this is by standing a large plant pot full of peat in a reservoir of water. Bees will drink from the wet surface, especially if this arrangement stands in a sunny spot. **Do not let it dry up.** It cannot be emphasised too strongly that drinking bees are harmless.

If all else has Failed

Through membership of a local Beekeeping Association which is an area member of the BBKA, the beekeeper gains protection of a third party insurance policy. This provides coverage against all third-party claims arising from his beekeeping activities involving injury to persons or damage to property.

If the situation between the neighbour and the beekeeper deteriorates to the point of legal action, then, assuming he is a member of a qualifying Association, he must inform the BBKA Treasurer, at **once**. This is very important. Any delay could result in a loss of compensation under this policy.

BBKA has a legal adviser who can give help on the law in this area, but any beekeeper threatened with legal action must engage the services of a solicitor. BBKA will not engage in legal action on behalf of a beekeeper. Remember, weigh up the situation carefully. Litigation is always expensive. It is much better to avoid it.

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Overflying

Bees normally fly about 5m above the ground but problems can occur from bees flying out from their hives and returning to them. In windy weather over open ground, bees fly very low because it is less effort. They only rise to fly over obstacles in their path.

The beekeeper can help by sheltering the apiary site with hedges or shrubs. It also helps if hives can be faced away from neighbouring properties. In addition, the height of the boundary fence can be raised by allowing hedges to grow to about two metres in height. A temporary barrier can be formed from sparrow-proof netting which bees will not readily fly through.

Cleansing Flights

After winter confinement in the cluster, bees' early flights on sunny spring days can result in anything in the vicinity of the hives being spotted with faeces. If this includes neighbours' laundry or cars, then their resentment is understandable.

This nuisance can be reduced by making sure that the bulk of the winter stores is well-ripened sugar syrup. Feeding should be finished by mid-September. High barriers round the garden will also help to keep the bees on cleansing flights circling near their hives.

Swarms

Neighbours will not necessarily welcome swarms onto their property. No beekeeper can guarantee preventing all swarms. However, the chance of swarms can be reduced to a very small percentage indeed.

You need:

- to keep all queens clipped;
- to have adequate spare equipment;
- to use a simple, effective method of swarm control (see BBKA Leaflet)
- to make sure hives are not over-heated by the summer sun;
- to seek help from a really experienced beekeeper if required.

Numbers of Hives or Colonies

There have been cases brought to court where the beekeeper kept an enormous number of colonies in his garden.

Sheer numbers of colonies can worsen all the problems touched on so far. It is impossible to give any definitive figure. Modern suburban gardens are not suitable at all. Larger gardens, depending on their size, could safely house up to six colonies. Gardens which could house more are few and far between.

Rights

Beekeepers have the right to keep bees. Their neighbours have the right to enjoy their property in peace. Badly kept and positioned colonies can be a nuisance.

Unfortunately, what the neighbour might see as a nuisance is likely to be given more consideration in a court than what the beekeeper sees as an interesting characteristic in his bees. Bees harmlessly drinking water from a pond may well, therefore, be deemed a real nuisance, even if all the beekeepers called to give evidence state the opposite. Also, the fact that the bees were there before the complaining neighbour will hold little importance in a court of law.

Avoiding Confrontation

Any beekeepers confronted with an angry neighbour should not meet aggression with more aggression.

Try to talk the problem through and take some positive action to attempt to allay the problem. It could well help to talk through with your neighbours the intention to keep bees. Share some of your honey with them and always emphasise the pollinating value of bees to the environment.

If the neighbour is the sort of person who is constantly worried about the bees, wants to grow plants to 'repel' them or remove plants that 'attract' them, and is worried if the bees will join him when he breakfasts *al fresco*, then it is likely that beekeeping next door will never be a pleasant experience. It would be simpler to keep your bees in out-apiaries and avoid any problems.