

installed near the stingless bee colonies. These will provide fresh water regularly. Therefore, there is a need to refill and change water regularly, say daily or as frequently as possible. In the pans, ensure you place floater twigs or material that stingless bees will hold on to prevent drowning.

4. Feed supplementation with sugared water should be provided during dearth, through feeders installed in the hives. In Kenya, these periods are rare, however, beekeepers need to be aware. Alternatively, do not harvest all honey and pollen, ensure you leave enough quantities for the bees.
5. Maintain cleanliness of bee housing areas. Avoid dumpsites and places that release bad odours as honey can trap the odours and make honey unpalatable

If the colonies are well managed, then we expect high honey production and thus more sales generating more income for the farmer. Pests and diseases will be avoided and therefore colonies will have reduced external stress factors.



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STINGLESS BEE HUSBANDRY





Introduction

Stingless bees are some of the tiniest groups of bees that make honey. They do not sting but they can bite, and most often they ward off their enemies by becoming a nuisance. The stingless bee honey is credited for its medicinal value. However, the honey is produced in small amounts, reflecting the size of the bee and the bee colony.

Stingless bee husbandry involves the care, management, and cultivation of colonies of stingless bees. Stingless bee husbandry is characterized by the unique behaviours and characteristics of these bees. A wide diversity of stingless bee species exists in Kenya, each requiring specific care for rearing them and reduce/avoid absconding.

Although stingless bees are generally less susceptible to pests and diseases than honey bees, beekeepers should be vigilant and take appropriate measures to prevent and manage any arising issues.

Important factors to consider to ensure effective care of stingless bees

Choice of hives

Do not transfer stingless bee colonies to unsuitable hives. If you do so, they will abscond. Ensure the hives are properly constructed to prevent entries of pests

Apiary/Housing

Ensure that the stingless bee colonies are placed away from direct rain and sunshine. This will increase the longevity of the hives and reduce the possibility of absconding by the bees due to harsh conditions. Stingless bee hives or colonies can be placed anywhere in proximity to human and/or livestock dwellings.

Scouting

A beekeeper should practice scouting and monitoring of their stingless bee colonies regularly.

There are various benefits of regular scouting:

1. Regular check-ups ensure that a beekeeper notices any form of invasion of colonies by pests and predators such as ants, lizards, spiders and other intruders. Immediate control and preventive measures will be put in place to avoid absconding by bees resulting in the loss of the entire colony.



The oil pots and grease application. Source: Peter Kwapong

2. During scouting, it is also possible for the beekeeper to note the status of the colony. For example, it is possible to notice bees preparing for swarming based on the increasing population. This will ensure the beekeeper is ready for another colony or provide a bigger space for the bees. Further, it is possible to notice the quality of the queen and if aged, she can be removed for another queen to be installed.
3. During scouting, you can detect readiness for harvesting. This will enhance timely honey harvesting and ensure a continued supply of hive products to enhance beekeepers' economic well-being.
4. Scouting enables beekeepers to detect other stressors such as exposed hives to scorching sun or exposure to rain. This will allow a beekeeper to move the hives to a nice place for the comfort of bees

Caring for the stingless bees

Carry out further various activities planned for ensuring stingless bees are comfortable. For example, the following can be done:

1. Burning and bushfires near the apiary (meliponary) should be avoided. These areas provide good bee forage. Further, smoke intoxicates bees and they can abscond especially with continuous exposure
2. Stingless bees should be kept away from farms where pesticides are applied. Create herbage buffers that will take up any form of pesticide drifts that can land on the colonies. Pesticide sprays should be done when it is not windy. Avoid using bee toxic pesticides, since information is available on pesticide labels.
3. During the dry season, water pans should be