

INTRODUCTION TO APICULTURE: IMPORTANCE AND HISTORY

Insects are dominant animals on this earth. Usually insects are considered harmful to man but hardly 1 % of insect species fall in the pest category. Benefits of insects in maintaining economy outweigh the injury inflicted. Honeybees are one of the few insects directly beneficial to man.

- In the animal kingdom, honeybees belong to: Phylum-Arthropoda, Class-Insecta, Order-Hymenoptera, Superfamily-Apoidea and Family-Apidae.
- Honey is highly valued food produced by honeybees and it is also used as medicine. In addition to honey, other products like bees wax, pollen, royal jelly and bee venom are also produced by honeybees.
- More than the producers of these hive products; bees play an important role in pollination of plants while collecting their food from flowers in the form of nectar and pollen.
- Pollination is involved in a chain of complex events significant to our economy. Pollination by insects including honeybees is important for ecological balance.
- Visitation by honeybees between distant varieties or cultivars promotes hybridization and help sparse populations to survive. Their mutual dependency has resulted into great degree of co-evolution.
- The science of rearing honeybees or beekeeping is known as apiculture.

We can learn a lot from these little wonderful creatures. Honeybees are admired for:

- Their industriousness
- Unity
- Self sacrifice
- Tolerance
- Division of labor
- Even the most feared bee stings help in healing muscular pains, rheumatism, arthritis and reduction in cholesterol level.

Beekeeping can be practiced as

- An ideal hobby
- Part-time business.
- Full-time business.

History of beekeeping

- Primitive man used to rob bee colonies found in the cavities of hollow trees or on rocks and in traditional mud houses and this is still being followed by some tribes
- There was no development in beekeeping until 16th century.
- Proper beekeeping started only when man started giving protection to colonies found in the nature.
- Idea to keep bees in log hives has been reported to come from the fallen trees which were nested by the cavity nesting bees.
- Development of modern beekeeping has its origin between 1500 and 1851 when many attempts were made to domesticate bees in different types of hives but were not successful because bees attached their combs together as well as to the walls of hive and combs required had to be cut for honey.
- The discovery of the principle of bee space in 1851 by L. L. Langstroth in USA resulted in first truly movable frame hive. This bee space was 9.5 mm for *Apis mellifera*.
- This discovery was followed by subsequent innovations like comb foundation mill, honey extractor, smoker, etc., which helped in the development of modern beekeeping we see today.