

Bees on Allotment Sites

By Bryn Pugh

Some of the materials in this advisory leaflet derive from my having watched, and worked with, my dearly loved and much missed paternal Grandmother, my *Puri Dai*, a Welsh Gypsy, who kept five skeps of bees. (The terms 'skep' and 'hive' can be used as synonyms even though the physical structures are different.)

NSALG has no objection, in principle, to bees being kept on an allotments site. The presence of insects which are beneficial pollinators needs, it is thought, no further explanation or recommendation. Indeed, **section 61 Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908** provides that it is *prima facie* lawful for bees to be kept on a plot

"... the expressions 'agriculture' and cultivation' shall include horticulture and the use of land for any purpose of husbandry, inclusive of the keeping of ... bees ...".

There is a principle of the UK Constitution to the effect that when interpreting or construing a Statute, the Statute must be read as a whole. **Section 28 subsection (1) Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908** confers powers on Municipal authorities to make rules "... as appear to be necessary or proper for regulating the letting of allotments under this Act ...".

S. 28 (1) might be used by a Municipal authority to prohibit the keeping of bees, since the only creatures which can be kept and housed on an allotment plot as of right, are domestic chickens, and/or rabbits, pursuant to the provisions of **section 12 Allotments Act 1950**.

Should a gardener receive the consent of the Municipal authority to keep bees on a plot – and this must not be taken for granted – then it is thought that the following procedures must be adhered to ; and the first two before bees are brought on to a site.

- (i) In the first place, the gardener must be, or become, a member of the British Bee Keepers' Association.
- (ii) He or she must have his or her own Public Liability insurance.
- (iii) The skep, or skeps, should be so sited that only the bee keeper can approach it or them. Bees operate on instinct, individual and shared. Should a skep be approached by any person not used to the ways of bees, the bees **will** attack and **will** sting, in defence of the skep.
- (iv) Arrangements must be made so that bees are forced to fly above

(v)

head height when leaving the skep to forage.

Fellow gardeners must be made aware that bees may swarm. A swarm is not in itself dangerous, unless it is disturbed – bees in a swarm have no 'home' to defend and hence are unlikely to attack and sting. If the swarm is left undisturbed for about an hour, the swarmed bees should be placid enough to be 'bagged off' by an **experienced bee keeper** and placed in an empty skep. On no account should any person other than an experienced bee keeper try to take a swarm – this is asking for trouble, whether the swarmed bees are placid or no. Swarming is essential behaviour for social creatures such as bees ; and may indeed be an essential part of reproduction.

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From the above, it is essential that the bee keeper has a 'mate' to hand in case an emergency arises when bees are being handled, whether in a swarm or no.

Points to Note

Bees don't like leather, for some reason (even *Puri Dai* didn't know why, just that they don't), so it is as well not to wear a wristwatch with a leather strap.

Bees don't like fur.

They don't like the smell of alcohol, especially on a person's skin – the vapour from pores. It is probably as well not to wear scent, or cologne – a bee might become interested. If so, then provided the subject of interest keeps still, **and doesn't flap at the bee**, it will quickly lose interest. Should a bee persist, the object of its interest should move **slowly** towards shade, or a hedge or tree. Quick movements invite a sting.

Stings



On the subject of stings : bees sting when provoked, or in defence of the skep, or the brood. The sting of a bee is barbed, and the instinct of a person stung is to brush the bee off. If this is done, then the bee's insides come away with the barbed sting. This is the source of the myth that a bee dies when it stings.

Should this occur – and it is a difficult, not to say, almost impossible, instinctive action to control – the sting should be stroked out in a sideways direction, never pulled out, of the afflicted area. If a sting is pulled out, the risk of the venom sac being squeezed is increased, so that a higher dose of venom might be injected. If the stung person be a child, medical attention should be sought as a precaution.



Bee stings are acidic in nature (as opposed to wasp and hornet stings, which are alkaline), so a stung area might be treated with a mild alkali, such as bicarbonate of soda, or borax