

Bees - are they protected? – by Peter Halford (June 2018)

“Bees - are they protected?” It seems an odd question for us as beekeepers to ask as, of course, we as beekeepers can see no reason for anyone to want to destroy any type of bee, let alone honeybees. However, the general public often look towards us as knowledgeable experts in all things bee-related and so it is important that we should know the facts; and the bottom line is, that whatever we may feel, “No, bees are not protected”. In fact, there is no mention of bees of any type in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69/contents>

Having said that, there are several relevant guidelines and advisory documents that relate to bees, and it is worth being aware of some of them.

1. **The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) website has in its “Guidance” section a frequently asked question page (FAQ) relating to Biocide use.**

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/biocides/faq.htm>

One of the questions in the Pest Control section is: **“Are honey bees beneficial insects?”**

The reply is: *“Honey bees, both feral (wild) and colonised, are important beneficial insects, not normally considered as pests. They live either in the wild in nests, or as colonies in hives kept by beekeepers. In either case, they will only sting people if strongly provoked.*

Because of their beneficial role, every effort should be made to avoid carrying out control treatments against honey bees. Treatment with a pesticide should be considered only as the last resort.”

Another question in the FAQ is: **“Should you treat a honey bee nest?”** The reply is: *“If you are asked to treat a feral honey bee nest, you should assess the situation carefully. Have people been stung by honey bees from the nest, or are they at risk because of its location? If the nest is not causing any risk to public health then you should carefully consider the alternatives before carrying out a treatment. If you are a member of the public, it may be better to consult a Professional Pest Controller rather than attempting to treat a nest yourself – see the question ‘Can you recommend a Pest Control Company’ for further details of contacting a Professional Pest Control company.”*

And also: **“What precautions should you take while carrying out a honey bee nest treatment?”** The reply is: *“If you consider treatment is the best option, make use of the British Beekeepers Association's spray liaison scheme. This will enable local beekeepers to be warned by their own Spray Liaison Officer. It is important for you to talk to local beekeepers in this way before treating a nest.*

Remember, members of the British Beekeepers Association can provide advice and can sometimes remove accessible feral honey bee colonies, avoiding the need to use pesticides.

Only use an HSE approved insecticide. Always read the label and use the product safely. Once the treatment is complete, you should take every reasonable action to prevent foraging honey bees from gaining access to the treated nest, by removing the combs or blocking the nest entrances.”

It is almost certainly because of this guidance that responsible pest controllers will ask people to call their local beekeeping association to assess the situation before they will consider exterminating a bees nest.

2. **The HSE website also has guidance covering risk assessment for bees and non target arthropods**

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pesticides/topics/pesticide-approvals/pesticides-registration/data-requirements-handbook/bees-and-non-target-art.htm>

The main guidance document can be found at the link below. Section 4 deals particularly with bees.

https://ec.europa.eu/food/sites/food/files/plant/docs/pesticides_ppp_app-proc_guide_ecotox_terrestrial.pdf

3. **The UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) was published back in 1994**, and was the UK Government's response to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). To support the work of the UK BAP, the UK BAP website was created by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) in 2001.

UK BAP priority species were those that were identified as being the most threatened and requiring conservation action.

A list of insects including many bees are listed at:

<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-5169>

The bees listed are as follows:

Scientific name	Common name
<i>Andrena ferox</i>	Oak Mining Bee
<i>Andrena tarsata</i>	Tormentil Mining Bee
<i>Anthophora retusa</i>	Potter Flower Bee
<i>Bombus distinguendus</i>	Great Yellow Bumblebee
<i>Bombus humilis</i>	Brown-banded Carder-bee
<i>Bombus muscorum</i>	Moss Carder-bee
<i>Bombus ruderalis</i>	Red-shanked Carder-bee
<i>Bombus ruderatus</i>	Large Garden Bumblebee
<i>Bombus subterraneus</i>	Short-haired Bumble-bee
<i>Bombus sylvarum</i>	Shrill Carder Bee
<i>Colletes floralis</i>	The Northern Colletes
<i>Colletes halophilus</i>	Sea-aster Colletes Bee
<i>Eucera longicornis</i>	Long-horned Bee
<i>Lasioglossum angusticeps</i>	
<i>Nomada armata</i>	
<i>Nomada errans</i>	
<i>Osmia inermis</i>	
<i>Osmia parietina</i>	Wall Mason Bee
<i>Osmia uncinata</i>	
<i>Osmia xanthomelana</i>	Large Mason Bee

N.B. as a result of devolution, and new country-level and international drivers and requirements, much of the work previously carried out by the UK BAP is now focussed at a country-level rather than a UK-level, and the UK BAP was succeeded by the 'UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework' in July 2012. The UK list of priority species, however, remains an important reference source and has been used to help draw up statutory lists of priority species in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

So, at the moment, no bee species in the UK are protected, but they should only be treated with pesticides as a last resort. Pesticide treatment of solitary bee species is unnecessary. Pesticide treatment of Bumble bees and Honey bees should only be undertaken if the bees present a threat to public health and all other options have been exhausted. You must not proceed with a Honey bee treatment until you have read the essential guidance.

A very good article appeared in The Express newspaper on 18th May 2017 that advises householders on what to do in the case of unwanted bees. It can be read online at:

<https://www.express.co.uk/life-style/property/806021/how-to-get-rid-of-a-bees-nest>

The public view of honey bees is becoming much more informed, almost certainly because of media articles such as the one above. The result is that government is also needing to become similarly informed. A **debate pack** (no: CDP 2017/0226) was prepared ahead of the debate held in Westminster Hall on 14th November 2017 on the UK bee population. This pack can be viewed at: <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CDP-2017-0226/CDP-2017-0226.pdf>.

Things are moving in the right direction and one day, hopefully in the not too distant future, bees may well become protected.

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