

# Bee story

Has this ever happened to you? You're talking to someone at a social event or at dinner and the other person starts talking about something that you think is quite obscure. Then you start seeing references to the same 'obscure' topic everywhere – in newspapers, on television, on the Internet. It happened to me a few weeks ago when my brother told me he wanted to start keeping bees.

I don't know much about bees. I know they are flying insects that produce honey. Honeybees live in hives and the queen bee is the most important bee in the hive. And I know from experience that some bees can sting you and that a bee sting hurts. Thanks to my brother I can tell you that a hive can be home for up to 100,000 bees. Bees exist on every continent except Antarctica and there are approximately 20,000 known species. My brother also told me that bees often communicate with each other by dancing but I'm not sure if that's true or not.

Since my brother told me that he wanted to become a beekeeper, I've seen references to bees everywhere. Some stories are curious. Last week I saw a news report about a swarm of 12,000 bees that appeared around the door of Cipriani's, an expensive restaurant on New York's Wall Street. No-one knows where the bees came from but they were probably looking for a new home or somewhere to eat.

Other stories are more dramatic. A few weeks ago there was a fatal road crash in Minnesota, USA. One of the two lorries involved in the crash was carrying around 17 million bees for a company that manufactures honey. The bees were being transported from Mississippi where they were kept during the winter.

And there are worrying stories. Many countries, including Britain, have seen a fall in their bee population. In Britain, the number of bees has fallen by 15 per cent in the last two years. Many people think agricultural chemicals and climate change are responsible. Researchers at Punjab University in India believe mobile phones might also be responsible. Their research shows that radiation from mobile phones affects the bee's navigation senses.

You might think that the fall in numbers isn't very important but you'd be wrong. Bees pollinate crops and are worth an estimated £200 million to British agriculture. The Food and Environment Research Agency (Fera) is responsible for the UK government's bee health policy and is encouraging the country's 40,000 beekeepers to help find a solution.

**1** Look at these newspaper headlines. The same word is missing from each one. What's the missing word?

- 1 The importance of \_\_\_\_\_.
- 2 It's a \_\_\_\_\_ market as insects swarm Wall Street.
- 3 Mobile phones responsible for disappearance of honey \_\_\_\_\_.
- 4 Swarm of \_\_\_\_\_ attack rescuers at US road crash.

**2** Read the article and match the titles and headlines from exercise 1 with the corresponding paragraph.

**3** Answer the questions.

- 1 Has the writer ever been stung by a bee?
- 2 Where is the only place you can't find bees?
- 3 What and where is Cipriani's?
- 4 How many lorries were involved in the crash in Minnesota?
- 5 What do researchers in India believe?
- 6 How much are bees worth to British agriculture?

4 Use the words to complete the sentences.

everywhere      no-one      someone      something      somewhere

- 1 You're talking to \_\_\_\_\_ at a social event.
- 2 The other person starts talking about \_\_\_\_\_ that you think is quite obscure.
- 3 You start seeing references to the 'obscure' topic \_\_\_\_\_ .
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_ knows where the bees came from.
- 5 They were looking for \_\_\_\_\_ to eat.

5 Find the words for these things in the article.

- 1 something you eat that is sweet (paragraph 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 the place where bees live (paragraph 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 a very large area of the Earth (paragraph 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 sudden and surprising (paragraph 4) \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 a group of people or animals that live somewhere (paragraph 5) \_\_\_\_\_
- 6 plants grown for food, usually on a farm (paragraph 6) \_\_\_\_\_

6 Use the letters to make the names of insects.

- 1 y f l
- 2 a t n
- 3 c h o a k o c r c
- 4 b e f l u t t r y
- 5 t l e e e b
- 6 s a w p

7 Do you think this sentence is *True* or *False*? If you have access to the Internet, use it to check your answer.

*Bees often communicate with each other by dancing.*

8 Answer the question at the start of the article. Tell your answer to another student. Then discuss why you would or wouldn't like to keep bees.

**Glossary**

- agricultural** (*adjective*) – relating to farming  
**beekeeper** (*noun*) – a person who keeps bees for their honey  
**crash** (*noun*) – an accident when a moving vehicle hits something  
**curious** (*adjective*) – unusual  
**fatal** (*adjective*) – causing someone to die  
**insect** (*noun*) – a small animal that has six legs and often has wings  
**obscure** (*adjective*) – not very well-known  
**pollinate** (*verb*) – to place pollen from one flower on another flower  
**species** (*noun*) – a plant or animal group whose members all have similar general features  
**sting** (*verb*) – if an insect stings you, it sticks a sharp part of its body into your skin  
**swarm** (*noun*) – a large group of insects flying together  
**topic** (*noun*) – subject