

BEEing a BEEkeeper

The Yenda Group is a proud supporter of World Bee Day. This day celebrates and recognises the important role these little pollinators play in our ecosystem.

Recently, the Yenda Group interviewed local Apiarist Matthew Skinner from Skinners Apiarist Services (Big Springs Honey), to find out what it is like BEEing a beekeeper.

HOW DID YOU GET STARTED IN BEEKEEPING?

I started working bees in 2009 when I got a job with Harold Saxvik JNR in Darlington Point.

WHAT TYPE OF BEES DO YOU KEEP?

Here at Big Springs Honey we keep European Honey Bees because they are the most productive for pollination and honey production.

The European Honey Bee (Scientific Name: *Apis mellifera*, Family: *Apidae*) is one of the most common species of Honey Bees worldwide, they are found in every continent except Antarctica. These Honey Bees are social insects and live in colonies of thousands. The average lifespan of an adult worker bee is 14-28 days compared to a queen bee's life cycle ranges between one to two years. On average they are 1.5 – 2cm long and weigh 0.113gms.

They are yellowish in colour and have black stripes along their abdomens. Their hind legs have sacs attached which are used as a pollen basket to carry pollen back to the beehive.

HOW MANY HIVES DID YOU START WITH? AND WHAT DOES YOUR BEEKEEPING OPERATION LOOK LIKE NOW?

We started Big Springs Honey with 120 hives. Today, our operation consists of 600 hives. We do pollination and honey production in the Riverina. The crops we pollinate in the area are almonds, cherries, melons and pumpkins.

European Honey Bees are herbivores. They primarily feed on pollen and nectar. The honeycomb of European Honey Bees is hexagonal in shape. This hexagonal shape is the most efficient shape in the world. The pattern is in such a way that it does not allow any empty space within. The structure of hexagonal cells can hold a large amount of weight even though the wax is very thin and delicate.



WE ALL KNOW THE PHRASE “AS BUSY AS A BEE”, JUST WONDERING, DO BEES SLEEP OR REST AT ALL?

Bees are busiest during the day and yes, they do rest and sleep at night.

WHAT IS THE MOST FULFILLING PART OF A BEEKEEPER’S JOB?

The most fulfilling part of being a beekeeper is the beautiful country that we get to see chasing honey flows and doing pollination. We put a lot of hard work and maintenance into our hives and seeing a nice healthy hive makes all the hard work rewarding.

HOW CAN SOMEONE CREATE A BEE FRIENDLY GARDEN? WHAT ARE THE BEST PLANTS TO GROW?

Bees will forage most flowers in your garden collecting honey or pollen. Having a good variety of plants flowering at different times of the year will help them keep breeding and stay healthy. Reducing the use of chemicals in your garden will also help in keeping the bees healthy.

HOW IMPORTANT ARE BEES TO AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION?

Bees are very important to agricultural production. A lot of crops rely on bees for pollination. For example, most varieties of almonds are 100% reliant on the honey bees for pollination. Cherries and blueberries are about 90% reliant on the honey bee for pollination. So, as you can see the honey bee plays a big part in the agricultural world.

Thank you to Matthew for sharing his insights and knowledge about bees.

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