



Eva Crane Trust

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BECKEERING IN BRITAIN

Eva Crane

As in most other European countries, beekeeping in Britain is mostly a spare-time occupation. There are probably not more than half a dozen beekeeping firms with more than 500 or 1000 colonies; quite a number of people however carry on beekeeping as a profitable part-time occupation, with a hundred hives or so. Fig. 1 gives some idea how the colonies are distributed in Britain. The bee population is most dense in the "Home Counties" near London, where the human population is most dense. In the high parts of Wales (the peninsula on the west of England) and of Scotland (the northern part of Britain) there are very few bees indeed.

Fig. 2 shows roughly how many colonies the average beekeeper keeps in the different counties of Britain. This gives some idea which are the best honey districts, because large apiaries can only be run profitably where there is a good honey yield. The honey yield per colony varies enormously, both in different parts of Britain, and from year to year. In good districts in good years it may be 50 kg. or more; in bad years and in poor districts the yield may be only 5-10 kg.

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Fig. 2 shows the average beekeeper has about 5 colonies; Fig. 3 shows a typical apiary in a town garden. The hives here are National - a very popular single-walled hive, which has a total comb surface in the brood chamber of 150 sq.dm. Colonies are often run with two brood chambers in the summer, giving 300 sq.dm. comb area. Almost all colonies in Britain are kept in wooden hives; the beehouse is almost unknown, and except in isolated country districts there are very few skeps.

Fig. 4 and Fig. 5 show parts of much larger apiaries, both with hives similar to the Dadant; the brood chamber is about half as large again as that of the National hive. Fig. 6 is a commercial apiary with double-walled hives; these are still very popular in Britain, although less so now than in the past.

A considerable amount of migratory beekeeping is carried out, especially in districts near heather moors. The Wanderwagen is almost unknown; hives are piled up on lorries, or taken in trailers or private cars. Fig. 7 shows colonies which have just been moved from Aberdeen to a bell heather (graue Glockenheide) site at Dinnet, a place which will be visited from the Scottish Conference at Aberdeen. Fig. 8 shows a typical stretch of heather moor (Besenheide), which will also be visited from the Conference.

Our bees in Britain are wintered in the open, and many beekeepers nowadays find that they winter best with no packing at all. Fig. 9 is typical; note the wide entrance (mouse guard inside); there is no packing between the brood chamber and the roof of the hive. The hive on the right has a nucleus (entrance towards the right) wintering above the colony in the chamber below.

Beekeepers' Associations are very active throughout Britain, and there is an exceedingly high standard of lectures on both practical beekeeping and Bienenwissenschaft. Many local authorities run residential summer schools in conjunction with the Beekeepers' Associations, when a full programme of lectures and demonstrations is arranged.

Bee breeding has received less attention in Britain than in Germany, there are comparatively few isolated mating stations, but one is shown in Fig. 10; this is Brother Adam's famous mating apiary on Dartmoor. Some readers will no doubt be visiting Brother Adam's ^{ies} apiary on the excursion immediately after the International Congress in September.

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Fig. 8. Double-walled hives at the heather { German Besenheide } (phot. E.P. Jeffree.)

Fig. 9. National hives in winter (phot. E.E. Crane.)

Fig. 10. Brother Adam's mating apiary on Dartmoor (phot. P.S. Milne)

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Fig. 1. Distribution of colonies in Britain (from applications for sugar

1948-49) (E.E. Crane Orig.)

A = 0-20 colonies/1000 hectares

B = 8-35 colonies/1000 hectares

C = 35-50 colonies/1000 hectares

D = over 50 colonies/1000 hectares

Fig. 2. Average number of colonies per beekeeper (from applications for sugar

1948-49) (E.E. Crane orig.)

A = less than 4 colonies per beekeeper

B = 4-5 colonies per beekeeper

C = 5-6 colonies per beekeeper

D = more than 6 colonies per beekeeper.

Fig. 3. National hives in the author's garden (phot: E.E. Crane)

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Fig. 4. Home Apiary at Buckfast Abbey (phot. P.S. Milne)

Fig. 5. Apiary in Northumberland (in England) (phot. C. Weightman)

Fig. 6. Commercial Apiary with double-^{walled} ~~would~~ hive (phot. E.H. Taylor Ltd.)

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(phot. Bee Research Dept. N. Scotland College of Agriculture Aberdeen)

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