



Eva Crane Trust

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BEE-KEEPING RESEARCH IN YORKSHIRE

HOW EVERYONE CAN HELP

By DR. EVA CRANE *

There were 5,847 bee-keepers in Yorkshire in the winter of 1944-45, who owned a total of 28,414 colonies of bees. These numbers are taken from the Ministry of Agriculture's published figures for the applications for sugar, and I am assuming that Yorkshire bee-keepers are both honest in claiming only for existing colonies, and sufficiently true to type to make sure of claiming **all** to which they are entitled.

Yorkshire is over twice as large as any other English county, and has more bees than any other, although Norfolk, with just over one third the area, runs it rather close with 22,012 colonies. On the other hand, the **density** of honeybee population in Yorkshire is comparatively very low. There are only 7 colonies per 1,000 acres, and only four of the 40 English counties have less than this density—Huntingdon, Rutland, Lancashire and Westmorland. Middlesex tops the list with 31 colonies per 1,000 acres. In the United States (1930-36 figures), however, only two States have a greater bee population density than Yorkshire—Ohio (10) and Indiana (8). It is of considerable interest that in 429 B.C. Pericles recorded that there were 20,000 hives in Attica in Greece: about 35 per 1,000 acres. (Migratory bee-keeping was practised in Attica, which was famous for the wild thyme honey from Mount Hymettus).

One in 750 of the population of Yorkshire keeps bees, compared with 1 in 150 in Norfolk and only 1 in 1,100 in Middlesex. Many factors enter into these differences: geology and climate, and hence the agricultural use of the land; industry, and hence the extent of built-up areas, some of which are industrial and apiculturally barren, and some of which are suburban, and house a large number of enthusiastic bee-keepers. It is significant that the greatest density of honeybees in England is in thickly residential counties near London: Middlesex and Surrey.

What about the distribution of bees and bee-keepers in different parts of Yorkshire? Is there a greater density of bees in urban or in rural areas? Which districts provide the largest honey crops? Are any districts overpopulated with bees? At present we can only guess the answers to these questions. Our Association, with 3,100 members, representing over half the bee-keepers in the county, covers an area over one tenth of the whole of England and Wales. It includes extensive industrial areas round Leeds and Sheffield, suburban areas in many large towns, rich arable lands with clover in the East Riding, pasture in the West Riding and, besides all this, woodland areas and 400,000 acres of heather moor. Surely no other county provides such a rich sample of England from the bee-keepers' point of view. How interesting it would be to compare quantitatively the conditions, methods and results of bee-keeping in these different parts of Yorkshire. It is explained below how, with your co-operation, we can do this

Until the last year or so there was no organisation in this country for co-ordinating bee research. In 1945, however, the B.B.K.A. appointed a Research Committee whose function is to stimulate and to organise research among bee-keepers, and to make available to them the results of other workers' research. Mr. Wedmore is Chairman, and Mr. Burt the Honorary Secretary, of the Committee; other members include Dr. Butler, Major Cormack, Dr. Crane, Dr. Gooding, Dr. Gregg, Mr. McNicol and Mr. Rolt. The method employed to co-ordinate research was to secure the appointment of Liaison Officers from each County or District Association. The Y.B.K.A. has not only appointed Mr. Higgins as Liaison Officer, but has set up a Research Committee to organise and encourage research in Yorkshire.

The B.B.K.A. Research Committee has four investigations in hand at present :—

<u>Subject.</u>	<u>Secretary.</u>
(1) Sources of pollen.	Dr. C. G. Butler.
(2) Emergence and laying of queens.	Dr. Eva Crane.
(3) Survey of wintering methods.	Dr. C. G. Butler.
(4) Effect of spring stimulation.	Dr. Eva Crane.

In each of these investigations, bee-keepers from all parts of the country have volunteered (usually through their Liaison Officers) to act as observers, recording their results as directed by the Committee.

In addition to this, we are trying to make contact with all individual bee-keepers who are either undertaking research or are especially interested in specific aspects of bee activity or behaviour. By doing this we are able to put workers in touch with others interested in the same aspects of bee-keeping, so that they can compare their ideas and results. Our thanks are due to those who have already communicated with the Committees about their own investigations.

Now the whole scheme clearly depends upon the co-operation of individual bee-keepers. The Y.B.K.A. Research Committee feels that so far it knows of only a small proportion of the many Yorkshire bee-keepers who are interested in research. Will any of these who have not already done so, please write as soon as possible to the Secretary, Mr. A. G. Higgins, Stapleton, near Pontefract, stating :—

- (a) whether they are willing to take part in investigations organised by the Y.B.K.A. and B.B.K.A. Research Committees, such as those listed above,
- (b) the problems in which they are especially interested, e.g., queen rearing, bee flora,
- (c) any specific investigations which they are carrying out,
- (d) any special facilities available, e.g., microscope, observation or scale hive,
- (e) any special qualifications or training, e.g., B.B.K.A. examinations, botanist.

Printed in this Year Book is a form which every member should complete and return to the Secretary of the Y.B.K.A. Research Committee. From the completed forms it will be possible to carry out a survey of bee-keeping in Yorkshire, and to answer some of the questions raised earlier. The results will be published in the Year Book for 1949; please help to make this survey representative by returning your form as soon as possible.