Honeybees in South Africa

- various landowners can do to help

South Africa's indigenous honeybees are managed by beekeepers for honey harvest and to provide a crop pollination service.

Managed honeybees are vitally important for food production in South Africa. More than 50 crops rely on insect pollination.

Beekeepers use various flowering plants to provide forage (food) for honeybees in the northern regions of South Africa.

Types of forage important to honeybees

- **Indigenous plants** that are important to beekeepers include fynbos species (e.g. arctotis, proteas, buchus and mesembs); aloe species (e.g. Aloë dichotoma); indigenous thorn trees (e.g. ziziphus); cirrus trees (e.g. Ziziphus mucronata; Bildjikke wood). In the latter two, provide important wind rows for honeybees in the northern region of South Africa.

- **Some agricultural crops** (e.g. canola, lucerne, sunflowers, clover) are significant forage resources for honeybees when flowering. Many beekeepers rely on growth of these crops agreeing to allow colonies to be placed on their farms.

- **Weeds** - some indigenous (e.g. winter weed and some weeds (e.g. Echina) - also provide important flowering resources for honeybees.

- **Eucalyptus trees** (e.g. gum trees) provide a reliable pollen source and nectar flow and the different species flowering at various times of the year makes them a dependable forage resource for colonies.

- **Protect natural vegetation on your farm and always consider plant resources when implementing management plans, Environmental Impact Assessments and agricultural best practice.**

What honeybees do can do

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- **Work with beekeepers to ensure that beekeeper sites are secure and inaccessible to vandals.**

- **Consider allowing access to beekeepers, local beekeeping associations are listed on www.vlsb.co.za**

Landowners can undertake the following:

- **Landowners with gum trees should identify the species and their location on the farm.**

- Those without could consider planting certain non-invasive species like E. ficifolia or E. gomphocephala in areas where they are not a threat to water resources or an invasive risk.

- **Eucalyptus trees should be removed if they are along watercourses, within protected areas or in ecosystems identified for conservation purposes.**

- **Six species of eucalyptus are listed (see names below) on the proposed invasive alien species regulations to be promulgated under the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act, (NEMBA), 2004 as “Category 1b” (i.e. they must be ‘contained’). However, several provisions have been made because of their value to beekeepers, e.g. they are not listed if 1) they are in certain biomes, 2) they are within cultivated land, 3) within 50m of homesteads, or 4) they are mature trees in urban areas.**

- **Eucalyptus cladocalyx - River red gum**

- **Eucalyptus conferruminata - Sugar gum**

- **Eucalyptus divaricata - Vegetable gum**

- **Eucalyptus dumosa - Karri**

- **Eucalyptus hybridacea - Buffel thorn**

- **Eucalyptus intermedia - Zew**

- **Eucalyptus leucoxylon - Forest red gum**

Although eucalyptus trees can be invasive, the goal should be to manage gum trees to limit the likelihood of invasion and reduce the impact on honeybee forage.

- **Lists of plant species important to beekeepers will be available on www.sanbi.org.za**

- **Visit www.sanbi.org for more information or contact SANBI's projects on pollination and honeybee forage.**

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- **Remember that agro-chemicals can have a major impact on all insects. Education on chemical application and safety is needed amongst farmers, farm workers and extension officers as off-label use is likely a problem in South Africa.**

- **Growers should discuss spraying regimes with beekeepers.**

- **Consider planting bee-friendly plants when gardening, planting wind-rows or woodlots.**

- **Convert your development (e.g. dam walls, roads, buildings, etc.) Check with your local nursery which species occur in your area to avoid invasive problems or hybridisations with wild species in the vicinity.**

- **Consult plantings complementary crop plants such as lavender or basil) or even fodder crops, like lucumus, clover or vetch that provide important honeybee forage.**

- **Do not unnecessarily spray or remove weeds that are attractive to bees.**

This brochure was produced as part of the maternal remanating from SANBI’s projects on pollination and honeybee forage.

Visit www.sanbi.org for more information or contact Mbulelo Mswazi (Outreach Officer) on m.mswazi@sanbi.org.za