

Urban beekeeping

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Urban beekeeping is the practice of keeping bee colonies in urban areas. It may also be referred to as **hobby beekeeping** or **backyard beekeeping**. Bees from city apiaries are said to be "healthier and more productive than their country cousins".^[1] Their presence also provides cities with environmental and economic benefits.

Bees pollinate a wide variety of plants, and the honey they produce is often sold to local restaurants and in local shops.^[2] Most cities in North America at one time prohibited the keeping of bees, but in recent years beekeepers have had success in overturning bee bans. Many urban areas now regulate

beekeeping.^[2] While registering beehives is often mandatory, a high proportion of urban beekeepers fail to inform the city.

The popularity of urban beekeeping was growing rapidly c. 2012^[2] perhaps due to its inclusion in the local food movement.^[3] Between 1999 and 2012, London saw a 220% increase in beekeepers.^[4] The number of urban beehives varies greatly from city to city and official counts may be inaccurate as hives are often not registered. As cities have limited greenspaces, the increasing popularity of the hobby may lead to lower honey yields as has been reported in London^[5] and New York City.^[6] According to a 2015 research study, urban environments favor viability and transmission of some disease agents that affect honey bees and may be a contributing factor to their diseases.^[7] Another problem created by a surfeit of bees is swarming,^[8] when a queen leaves an overcrowded colony with a retinue of workers to start her own.



Honey bee in Toronto

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Urban beekeeping cities

Some cities are veritable hives of beekeeping activity while others offer plentiful green space but harbor few apiaries.

London

Beekeeping in London has become increasingly popular. The number of beekeepers rose 220% between 1999 and 2012^[4] with other figures showing a 200% increase between 2008 and 2013.^[9] As of 2012, an estimated 3,200 apiaries exist in London, and while registration is mandatory, 75% were thought to operate without license.^[5] The density of hives in London is much greater than in other areas of the UK, and this has led to concerns that city greenspace may not provide sufficient forage to sustain burgeoning bee populations.^[9]



Bees producing honey in a hive.

The UK government has aided the rise of keeping bees in cities by releasing a plastic beehive purpose-built for urban beekeeping. Called Beehaus, it is supported by quango Natural England.^[10] Organizations supporting best practices for urban beekeeping in London include The London Beekeeper's Association,^[11] which holds monthly meetings, provides mentoring to new beekeepers, and lends out beekeeping supplies.^[12]

In London, bees are kept at department store Fortnum & Mason,^[5] Lambeth Palace,^[3] Buckingham Palace,^[13] the London Stock Exchange,^[5] the Natural History Museum,^[3] the Tate Modern,^[14] and at the Royal Lancaster Hotel,^[5] etc. Hives once stood atop the Bank of England as well.^[3]

New York

Until 2010, beekeeping was illegal in New York City, but this had little effect on the many New Yorkers who built and maintained hives. Prior to being recognized by the city, urban beekeeping had become an established hobby, and a support network of organizations, blogs, and supply stores was already in place.^[15] When the ban was lifted, only the non-aggressive *Apis Mellifera* species was allowed to be kept.^[16] While registering beehives is required,^[16] as of 2012 only half of the 400 bee colonies thought to be situated on New York rooftops had been reported to the city.^[6]

There are many organizations that support best practices for urban beekeeping in New York.

In New York, there are beehives at InterContinental The Barclay Hotel,^[17] the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel,^[17] the York Prep School,^[6] the Brooklyn Navy Yard,^[18] and the Bank of America Tower (New York City).^[19]

Toronto

While urban beekeeping is touted as a new trend, hives have been kept discretely in Toronto for many years. Several beekeepers kept around fifty hives each along the Don River in the beginning of the 20th century, and there was a beekeeping co-op near the Don Valley Brick Works into the late 1950s. Mayor William Dennison kept nineteen colonies in his Jarvis Street backyard in the 70s.^[20] In the 1970s, beekeeping equipment was being sold out of downtown's Little Italy / Little Portugal area.

Toronto does not have a bylaw governing beekeeping, so the Ontario Bees Act applies. The Act does not address urban beekeeping, and contains a 30-meter set back requirement for property lines, and a 10-meter set back requirement for highways;^[21] however the rule has gone largely unenforced as few urban lots are spacious enough to meet requirements concerning proximity to property lines, dwellings and highways. In 2011 there were 107 registered hives in Toronto.^[22]

Some of the many Toronto landmarks which host honeybee hives include: the Fort York historic site,^[23] the rooftop of the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts,^[22] the University of Toronto,^[22] the roof of Amsterdam Brewing Company,^[20] and the Fairmont Royal York hotel.^[24]

Halifax

Beekeepers in Halifax must register with the Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture.^[25] In the downtown area of the city, it has been suggested that beekeeping should be limited to rooftops.^[26]

Vancouver

Often regarded as a green and sustainable city, the City of Vancouver has recognized hobby beekeeping in residential areas by issuing guidelines and requiring hives to be registered.^[27]

Organization supporting best practices for urban beekeeping in Vancouver include the Strathcona Beekeepers Association, a small band of beekeepers situated in Strathcona, Vancouver.^[28] Nearby beekeepers can benefit from their expertise and also borrow equipment.^[28]

In Vancouver, Vancouver Convention Centre^[29] and Vancouver City Hall^[30] are two places where bees are kept.



Western honey bee

Montreal

Montreal's beehives are regulated by a governmental agency called MAPAQ, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Quebec). This agency enforces a set of regulations surrounding the installation of a beehive in order to protect the health of colonies, but these rules are rarely restrictive enough to deter or discourage committed hobbyists.

The Westmount Library, a locus of learning and community, has a public honeybee hive on its roof that has live inspections every two weeks during the summer months for kids, parents and the elderly. Montreal Botanical Gardens hosts honeybees as a part of their summer exposition, having introductory workshops with daily tour groups. As part of their 135th anniversary, Birks Group installed three honeybee hives on the roof of their downtown headquarters in Montreal.^[31]

In the summer of 2014, the Accueil Bonneau homeless facility launched a pilot project introducing their itinerant community to the art of beekeeping as a means of re-engaging them in a fulfilling and meaningful hobby.^[32]

Most of the public beekeeping initiatives stem from companies offering beekeeping services that make it more accessible to urban dwellers, such as Alveole, Apiguru, or Miel Montreal. The move towards a comprehensive approach to producing local produce is part of why beekeeping is becoming more and more popular in this metropolitan city.^[33]

Chicago

In 2003, Richard M. Daley, then Mayor of Chicago, had two beehives placed atop City Hall. Michael S. Thompson was put in charge of their care. Subsequently, the bee population in the city has grown, and by 2011 there were an estimated 160,000 bees calling Chicago home.^[34]

In 2013, a ban on beekeeping was defeated in the Chicago suburb of Skokie. The village may regulate backyard beekeeping in the future.^[35]

Johannesburg

Johannesburg has over 6 million trees and on satellite pictures looks like a rain forest.^[36] This environment is highly beneficial for urban beekeepers, who often have higher honey yields per hive than other Highveld beekeepers. In South Africa, anyone who handles bees must be registered as a beekeeper with the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (South Africa).^[37]

Milwaukee

In 2010, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, passed a beekeeping ordinance^[38] allowing individuals to practice beekeeping in the urban center of the city. This was spurred by the growing need to create sustainable food systems in the urban center, led by organizations like Growing Power and Victory Garden Initiative (<http://victorygardeninitiative.org/>). Since 2010, a variety of urban beekeepers have started taking part in Milwaukee's Community Pollinator Initiative (<https://www.bepods.com/advocate/milwaukee->

pollinator/),^[39] led by an organization called Beepods (<https://www.beepods.com/>). Their efforts have led to the beginnings of a shift in sustainable practices across individuals, organizations, the city and county, all by creating awareness, educational opportunities and supplying innovative solutions that allow almost anyone to get started in beekeeping without the risk of going it alone.

See also

- I Have a Bee

Other cities

Urban beekeeping exists in many major cities and has been reported in: Berlin,^[40] Hong Kong,^[41] Melbourne,^[42] Sydney,^[43] and Tokyo,^[44] among others.

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A Beepod Vented-Top-Bar Hive on the roof of a non-profit, CORE/El Centro, overlooks downtown Milwaukee and serves as an education location to teach new beekeepers.

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