

Proper management of beehives leads to big honey harvest, writes Brian Ssenoga.

The recent change in climatic conditions have brought out an uncertainty in weather patterns but what is more evident are the long spells as compared to the rains amounts expected.

This has affected plants, crops and pollinators.

"Honeybees are a very important component of the ecosystem, providing services and highly valuable products to the human being that it is important to take care of them especially during the dry season," said Dr Patrice Kasangaki, head apiculture research at National Agriculture Research Organisation (NARO), at the sidelines of the bee keepers annual general meeting in Kampala.

The products provided by honeybees range from food, medicine, cosmetics to art while services include pollination of agricultural and wild plants and indicators of environmental health.

Bees have been hunted for their products and after man realised their importance, he started to keep them in cavities called beehives which mimic their natural habitats.

However, the value of bees as service providers remains ignored despite their being critical to agricultural livelihood sources and ecosystem functioning.

"There should be a nearby source of water, enough trees to serve as wind breaks. This is because high wind speed causes reduction in flight and also distorts the flight direction thus reducing foraging activity."

Therefore, it is important to keep beehives under tree shade or artificial structures constructed to provide shade.

Three following can be done to sustaining the bees during dry season;

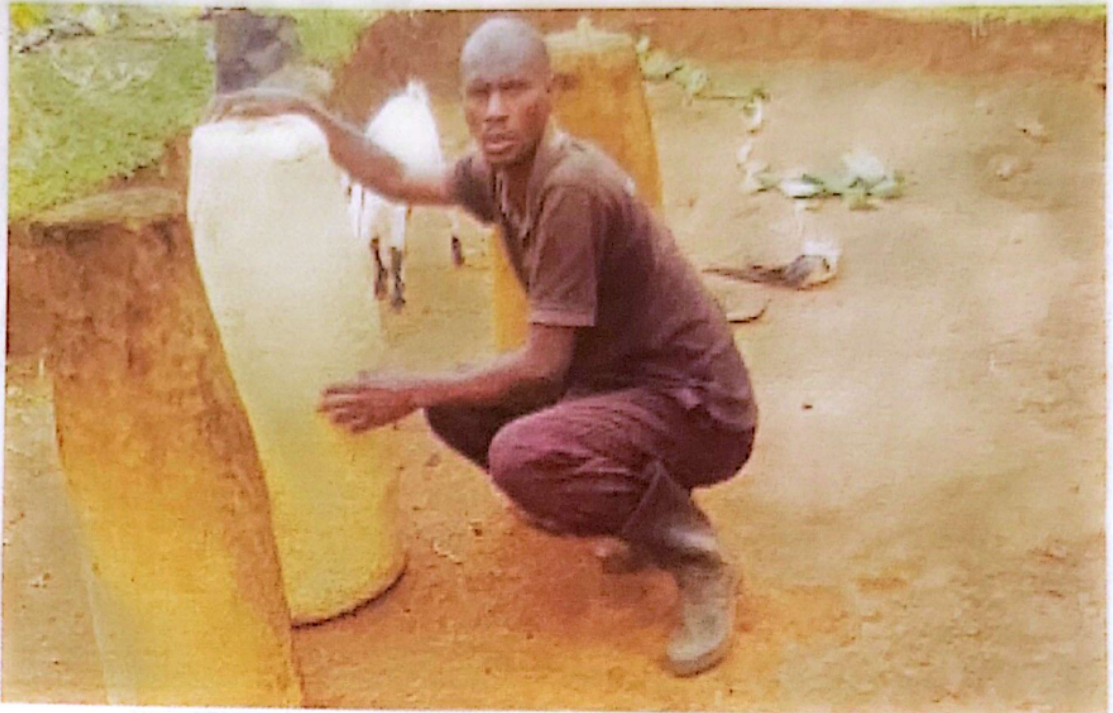
Control swarming and absconding

Swarming can take place anytime of the season and when it happens when the colony is weak; it may lead to the collapse of the colony.

Absconding on the other hand is a situation where by the entire colony abandons the to look for another hive, regular inspection helps in identifying colonies which are preparing to swarm and also identify conditions which may lead to absconding and appropriate control measures taken.

Do artificial feeding

To sustain bees during dry season when natural sources of nectar and pollen are scarce, bees can be fed on sugar syrup or sugar dough.



Bee keeper Julius Ayebare shows off his hives. PHOTOS BY DENIS BBOSA

Managing bees during dry seasons

However this should be tried in very difficult situation

Provide drinking water

This should be fresh and clean water and within a short distance of an apiary.

Unite weak bee colonies

It is advisable that two or three of weak colonies be united to make one strong colony which can forage effectively and resist pest and disease attacks. In this case, only one queen is retained.

Provide shade

When it is very hot and there are no sufficient tree shades, the colonies can be covered with grass or papyrus mats to reduce the effects of heat.

Keep the apiary clean

To avoid losing your colonies to wild fire, make sure that you keep your apiary clean and without dry grass.

FACTS

- There are three types of bees in the hive – Queen, Worker and Drone.

- The queen may lay 600-800 or even 1,500 eggs each day during her 3 or 4 year lifetime.

Pest and disease control

During dry periods most honeybees colonies are always weak due to insufficient forage and water supply. Weak colonies are easily attacked by pests and diseases.

Pests such as lizards, rats escape from fires to, hide in hives during the dry seasons and need to be controlled through installing rat guards and suspending beehives on wires.

Apiary inspection

Regularly inspect your apiary.



Bees inside the hive. COURTESY PHOTO

This is important because it will help you identify any problem within the apiary and appropriate remedies made accordingly. Apiary inspection will help you find out whether there is need for any of the above mentioned.

Finally a beekeeper has to plant

crops and trees that yield good pollen and nectar (bee forage). Plants which are good source of nectar Tamarind, Moringa, Neem, Eucalyptus and Bottle brush while sorghum, Sweet Potato, Millet, Coconut, and Roses, are good for pollen.

HOW TO START MODERN BEEHIVE

Warren who has been keeping bees since 2000. "You'll meet people who have had bees for years and you'll get lots of valuable information from

law"

4. Fence in your backyard.

Build your fence before you buy your bees. The

If something happens to one of the swarms, you can use the second swarm to raise new bees to replace the first. Warren says to start out small by ordering 3 to 5 kilograms of bees.