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## What role do beekeepers play in bee health?

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Honeybees are under major pressure from a variety of factors. Beekeepers and bee farmers have a key role to play in ensuring their healthy survival but we know little about the attitudes and motivations of this sector.

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### What do we know?

In the past ten years pressures on bees from pesticides, diseases and parasites and lack of forage are likely to increase.

Honeybees provide vital pollination services and so the apiculture sector plays a crucial part in their healthy survival. Research in CRE has shown that:

- The increasingly complex knowledge demands regarding disease control poses a challenge to the sector.
- Beekeepers are varied in nature, include commercial bee farmers and natural bee keepers, and even within these groupings opinions are diverse.
- Some beekeepers are not engaging with official networks and bodies and there is often a lack of trust.
- On-line forums are popular knowledge sources but most beekeepers value opportunities for face-to-face discussion/mentoring. The recent interest in beekeeping has compounded due to increased imports of bees (and disease), lack of capacity for training and mentoring.

### What are the implications for UK research and policy?

Approaches suggested by stakeholders included:

- A national action plan to address the multiple causes of pollinator decline.
- Top-down, well facilitated support for knowledge exchange, including meetings and an on-line forum.
- More legislation and incentives to encourage bee-friendly farming practices.
- More support for the commercial bee farming sector and provision of apprenticeships.
- More long-term research on effects of pesticides, food security and bee genetics, and more applied research to address specific management problems.
- Involvement of bee keepers and use of citizen science to gather data and carry out field experiments.
- Better training linked to compulsory registration of beekeepers.

## Further information:

### CRE Research projects:

- Karen Scott and Sue Bradley, Centre for Rural Economy *The Hidden Work of Beekeepers\_* (2011- 2012) This included a study of bee health practices and attitudes and analysis of the nature of beekeeping networks (40 in-depth interviews across Durham and Orkney).
- Karen Scott and Sue Bradley, Centre for Rural Economy and Birmingham City University - Defra funded project *Honey Bee Health: Mapping, Analysis and improved understanding of stakeholder groups to help sustain honey bee health* (Oct 2012-Oct 2013). This includes interviews of bee health stakeholders UK-wide and a stakeholder mapping analysis to formulate recommendations for Defra in supporting this sector.
- Defra (2009) *Healthy Bees. Protecting and improving the health of honey bees in England and Wales.*

**Contact:** Karen Scott email [k.e.scott@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:k.e.scott@ncl.ac.uk)

**CRE Policy Brief No 6**

**September 2013**