

Chapter 3

Setting the Scene

What follows is an overview of traditional, natural and what happens in the wild.

So what happens in the wild?

Bee's ideal habitat is inside a tree. It will have other bugs in it, it will be high up, and they will stay there for many years.

A quick over view a year in the life of the hive.

In late summer the drones are all kicked out. The queen is still laying and they start building honey stores in earnest. Then when there is no more food about, the remaining bees and the queen all move to the highest point as this is where the warm air is trapped, and they live off the honey stores. They do not go dormant in this hibernation time as they keep warm by vibrating and they still fly out for a pool!

Then in Spring, once the flowers are out with nectar and pollen, the queen moves down, to near the entrance. She lays eggs, babies called brood. Workers, queens and drones are hatched like mad. As soon as they are strong the queen flies off to a new hive location. This is with about half the workers. This has been pre-scouted, but can still be quite hit and miss. The new queen will fly up and mate with drones from other hives, and then will start laying. This is what bees are trying to do. Not make honey. That is just for winter.

So now with this basic understanding lets have a look.

Commercial beekeeping

This is a venture, so money is the driving force. Money derived from, honey or the sale of other bee related products. Selling the actual bees, or the products that this accompanies this like pesticides, bee food, wax, hives, NucS, packages and so on.

The only bee welfare is to keep them alive so that you can make money. This has a very dark side with things like the sale of bees and queens from areas with unlisted bee diseases into areas where they are reportable. For instance, you can buy bees from areas in Europe that have EFB and have them delivered into the UK, this included bumblebees.

Traditional Bee-keeping:

The hive is open and inspected, every few weeks all summer; this is like having surgery every two weeks, as the hive is the entity rather than the individual bee.

Cutting through the propolis injures the hive every 2 weeks increasing the risk of infection.

This is because each bee is like a cell in a body, not a body in its own right. Furthermore, instead of each bee possessing an immune system, the bees mutually defend each other, and secrete propolis round the outside and inside of the hive that is anti-fungal, anti-biotic and therefore helps protect them from infection.

It must also be understood that honeybees appear to have a common consciousness and that the queen is just a member of this common consciousness the same as any other bee.

When opening for inspection, traditional bee-keepers then kill drones, kill queens, import exotic queen bees from other parts of the world, they breed queens, they fill the hives with chemicals, they restrict the queen's movements, they stop swarming, they feed with cane sugar and the list goes on and on. They mate her with specific drones.

They feed sugar, and in Spring they feed pollen to get the queen laying earlier.

They use plastic hives, and foundation. They use wax foundation from all over the place. They guesstimate how much the bees will need over winter if any!

They keep all other bugs out and use pesticides to do this inside the hive!

They ship hives about.

They heat the honey when processing.

Pick up any bee-keeping book and scrutinise every practice and you will see they are all flawed, for the bees and purely geared for the bee-keeper!

Every one of these practices that are preached as good husbandry have all sorts of implications.

Natural Bee-keeping:

Normally, all of the above, but without the chemicals, sometimes, and without the restriction of the queens movement sometimes. But pretty much everything else. Perhaps not quite so natural after all, eh?

Log hive

Basically a hollowed out tree stump. Sometimes they allow for a biomass bead in the bottom but not always. Not ideal for mass production and thus have a limited availability due to the price. No honey can be had. They are inspected from the

bottom or through a slot in the side. They can have bees put in them or they can self-populate. I think they are a great option for people who can afford them as long as it is all done in an ethical manor.

Gardener's beehive

Bees must be local

Be from a swarm that was caught or that just moved in. Another way to look at keeping bees is to consider the bee-keeper more as being "adopted by the bees" than the bees being captive.

Main brood area is never opened. (To inspect an endoscope can be used to look and take samples.)

They are never fed.

Only honey from honey boxes is ever taken, the design is such bees will only ever store excess honey in the honey boxes.

No pesticides are ever used.

Swarming is allowed, and never inhibited.

Hives are never in apiaries, but spread about over a wide area.

Hives will always be symbiotic environments for more than just the bees.

Once a hive becomes too old, the old is burnt and replaced, with a new one.

Parts are never shared with other hive.

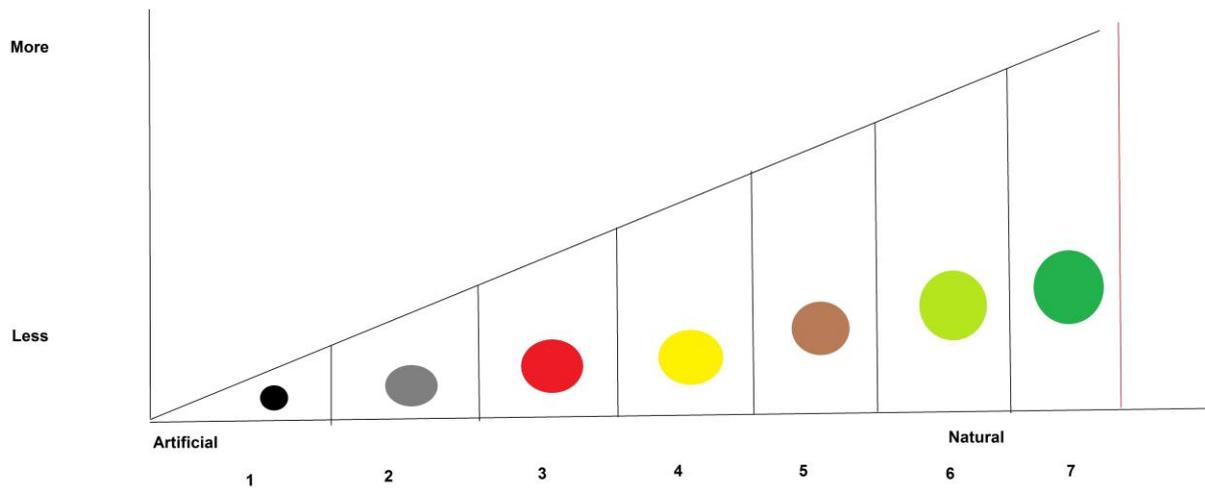
Comparison chart.

So there is no official line drawn where commercial stops and conventional starts or where conventional merges in to natural. But there is a very defined line between natural beekeeping and wild beekeeping and honey bee hosting.

Any system where you are using frames can be commercial, but can never be natural. Once to move over to top bars in a hive like a Top-bar you can do everything you can do in a framed hive, and more, but also natural, but never wild as the hive needs to be vertical for natural. I say this as we live in a cold climate. In a warm climate this would not be as relevant. Warre hive still has top bars, but a Japan's hive is verging on wild bee hosting. Just to add to the mix, are skep beekeeping, and

even though one kills more than half your bees every year it is less harmful than any commercial or conventional beekeeping.

Below is a graph of least to most beneficial for the bees.



1. Commercial beekeeping. No interest in bee's welfare. Castrate hive with swarm control. Feed. Move hives around. Imported bees and queens. Controlled genetics. Use of chemicals. All approved by the BBKA
2. To 3 conventional beekeeping.
4. Skep beekeeping, warre hive, some top-bar-hives
5. Log hive with no symbiotic floor
6. Gardeners Beehive, Log hive with symbiotic floor. Bees in the wild.
7. Bees in the wild, bees in a gardener's beehive. But in a total organic environment like in Cuba.