

INFORMATION SHEET:

Indigenous plants as honey bee forage

South Africa's honey bees, managed by beekeepers to provide crop pollination, play a vital role in human lives. But when they are not pollinating crops, **where do these hundreds of thousands of honey bees go?** In order to support their bee hives, South African beekeepers use a variety of **flowering plants to provide forage (food)** at different times of the year to keep bees strong and healthy for pollination. Eucalyptus trees, certain crop species like sunflower or canola, indigenous trees and shrubs, and even urban garden plants and roadside weeds are used to provide the pollen (protein) and nectar (carbohydrates) that the honey bees need to build a strong and healthy colony.

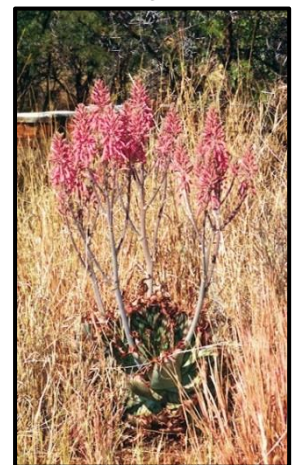
Forage availability and accessibility are a large constraint to beekeepers in South Africa. For honey bee populations to withstand pests, diseases and other stresses, a healthy diet is crucial for a fully-functioning immune system. Unhealthy honey bees can lead to insufficient pollination of the crop flowers, leading to decreased yield or quality of the food crop.

Indigenous plant species that stand out as important forage for South African beekeepers include: fynbos plant species (e.g. ericas, proteas and mesembs), several species of aloe (including mountain aloe), shrubs like wild asparagus and buchus, and indigenous trees such as *Vachellia karroo* (sweet thorn) and *Ziziphus mucronata* (buffalo thorn). Many regional vegetation types are also vitally important to beekeepers.



Honey bee on a fynbos *Erica sp*
 [Photographer: John Donaldson]

Aloe greatheadii var. *davyana* an important bee forage plant
 [Photographer: Per Kryger]



What we need to do about indigenous plants important as honey bee forage

- Protect natural vegetation through incorporating pollinator habitat or forage concerns into land clearing authorizations, Environmental Impact Assessment processes, landuse planning policies and tools, and into agricultural best practice.
- Encourage landowners who have important bee-forage resources on their land to consider allowing access to beekeepers in a controlled manner.
- Plant more indigenous bee-friendly plants, as long as they are appropriate to the specific localities (to prevent hybridisation or invasions). This could involve:
 - Encouraging rehabilitation projects to consider bee-friendly plants first.
 - Encouraging public land planting (e.g. under power lines, along road verges, urban greening programmes) to consider bee-friendly plant species first.
 - Encouraging all landowners to garden with bee-friendly plants.

Plant bee-friendly plants



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