



Media Release

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OUR BEES BRING BUSH TUCKER TO THE 'BURBS

Australia's social native bees are stingless, and a great source of delicious, aromatic bush honey, say CSIRO researchers.

The honey is sweet, but the most important reasons for people keeping hives of native bees is for conservation, according to CSIRO entomologist, Dr Tim Heard.

"Native bees are important for pollinating native plants. They are especially useful in areas where bush regeneration activities are underway," says Dr Heard.

"CSIRO is also interested in native bees for crop pollination to complement the important role played by then European honey bee," says Dr Heard. "Our aim is to increase the number of species available for this purpose."

Using a native species for crop pollination and as a source of food is also a positive move for the bees, as clearing bush for farming has caused them to vanish from many areas.

"Using a natural resource like native bees may ultimately ensure their protection," he says.

Our native stingless bees are low maintenance and are especially suited for family life in the suburbs. In fact, CSIRO research showed that 56 percent of native stingless beekeepers kept their hives in suburban backyards.

"People keep native bees for many reasons – enjoyment, conservation, crop pollination, honey production and hive sales," Dr Heard says.

"They have an affection and affinity with these attractive creatures, and are now finding that stingless bees can be kept in hives and can be propagated."

Dr Heard and colleague Dr Anne Dollin have recently completed a review of native beekeeping in Australia, which will provide a valuable historical baseline for this rapidly expanding industry.

Native bees are adapted to life in the tropics where there are always flowers around, and the winters are shorter and more mild, so they only produce small amounts of honey. Dr Heard points out that wild honey harvesting can harm the colony.

"You can do a lot of damage to nests in the wild by removing the honey," Dr Heard says.

"The honey should only be harvested from native colonies kept in box hives and only at certain times."

15 years ago, there was no native beekeeping industry in Australia – but this has turned around in recent times and has the potential to become an important cottage industry of the future.

For more information, see Dr Anne Dollin's Aussie Bee website www.zeta.org.au/~anbr/.

To obtain a copy of the review paper "Stingless bee keeping in Australia: snapshot of an infant industry" contact Dr Tim Heard on 07 3214 2843

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Images of Australia's Native Stingless Bees available from

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