

# ECO THREAT FROM EURO BEES

A state-wide survey in Tamil Nadu conducted by **KEYSTONE**, an Eco-Development Group in Kotagiri, Nilgiris, on the status of honey hunters and beekeepers shows that the situation of the Thai Sac Brood Virus (TSBV), a disease which attacks the honey bee at the larval stage, is bad. It had attacked all the 15 hill ranges they visited and destroyed large populations of the Indian Bee (*Apis Cerana*). The cause of the disease and remedy are still unknown.

According to **Keystone**, as an alternative to the Indian Bee, the introduction of *Apis mellifera* (European Bee) in the southern tropical states is proving to be unsuccessful. Since 1880, considerable interest has been taken to import *Apis mellifera* into India. For almost 100 years, all attempts have failed, despite consignments of bees from England, Italy, Lebanon, USA, Australia and USSR.

During the 1970s, a fairly large number of colonies were successfully established in the Himalayan region. Bee colonies are now being supplied to other areas of India, to promote beekeeping with the exotic Western bees, as in the Nilgiris.

Even though much attention in India is focused on the short term economic gains from *Apis mellifera* beekeeping, **Keystone** feels that a number of other perspectives should be seriously considered before widespread introduction is attempted. According to them:

- 1) In case *Apis mellifera*, despite an unfavourable environment, proves itself superior to *Apis cerana*, the endemic bee may become extinct and a valuable gene reserve needed in the future will be lost. Transfer of diseases, unknown and harmful to the endemic bee could escalate the loss of genetic reserves.
- 2) The pollination pattern of *Apis mellifera* is different from that of *Apis cerana*, the Indian bee, which has the ability to enhance Biodiversity through multicrop pollination. It is able

to feed at any strata in the forest floor as well as canopy. The European bee's behaviour does not allow this. It selects the principal crop and pollinates that profusely. This gives encouragement to monoculture. A massive introduction of *Apis mellifera* could cause a decline in floral diversity. Surveillance tools to determine whether this actually happens has yet to be developed.

3) With the introduction of *Apis mellifera* into new areas, serious diseases, unknown and harmful to the endemic bees, can be imported and cause heavy economic losses among already established local beekeepers, dependent on *Apis cerana*.

4) Beekeeping with *Apis mellifera* in India is heavily dependent on use of pesticides in the beehives to control the *Varroa mite*. Residues of most pesticides are accumulated in honey and beeswax, and could cause a health risk in the long run.

## SNC HAILS BAN ON ROSEWOOD FELLING

SNC hails the statutory ban on felling of rosewood trees in the Nilgiris district. This government measure should augur well for the ultimate ban on felling of all naturally-grown trees in the district.

SNC, which has been relentlessly campaigning for a moratorium on felling of naturally grown trees thanks the Chief Minister Dr. J. Jayalalitha for the bill which could be a forerunner to other states in general and the states of Kerala and Karnataka, through which the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve runs in particular.

Commercial trees like the eucalyptus, wattle, pine and silver oak could be earmarked to fulfil the social needs. This is the only way to preserve the Nilgiris as a water catchment for the State.

**Address for Correspondence :**

**Save Nilgiris Campaign, 15, Venus Flats, 12 Maharaja Surya Road, Madras - 18.**

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