

Dream Jobs: Beekeeper

By Melissa Viney, The Guardian, adapted by Newsela staff on 11.17.16

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A beekeeper. Courtesy of Pixabay.

An early school lesson about bees sparked the imagination of Chris Harries. Today, many years later, this means Harries spends his days surrounded by bees.

Harries is a beekeeper at the Sedgemoor honey farms in England.

He drives around to take care of his colonies. This includes checking that the bees are healthy and replacing screens for them to fill with more honey. Harries does this for about 300 hives. Each hive has up to 60,000 bees.

He also sells bees to new beekeepers and helps them learn. His telephone rings all the time with people asking bee-related questions.

Without Bees, People Would Not Have Enough Food

Bees must be protected so they can do their job. Bees do not just make honey. They transfer pollen from crop to crop. This allows crops to grow. Without bees, people would not have enough food.

Harries says there are two parts to his job. One is producing honey and breeding more bees. The other is bottling and selling the honey.

One hive can make 14 kilograms (almost 31 pounds) of honey in just two days if the weather has been good.

To remove honey, Harries will place honeycombs into a large spinning drum. Harries wears white overalls when visiting his hives, "but they'll sting through that and my trousers ... But equally, I can look at 60 hives some days and not get stung."

Worker Bee Performs A Dance

The honey is bottled in a large shed in his backyard. Harries' wife helps him. Bottling takes place all year round. They make 10.5 tons a year. This is more than 20,000 pounds of honey.

"We add no chemicals to it and we take nothing away. It's completely natural, just as the bees produce it," Harries says.

But of course, all the real work has been done by the bees. Bee dancing takes place when a worker bee has located a new source of nectar. She returns to the hive and performs a dance, pointing in the direction of the nectar.

After 30 years of beekeeping, he still loves to watch them dance. Now that the hobby has become a very busy business, is Harries still as fascinated by bees as he was as a schoolboy?

"Oh, definitely," Harries says.

Job Stats

Pay: "I probably make £30,000 (\$36,663). It's 10.5 tons (more than 20,000 pounds) of honey a year at £2 (\$2.44) a pound, minus costs."

Hours: "I start at 9 a.m. or, if I'm shifting hives, it might be 4 a.m., before they start flying. That way I'm working into the daylight. It's less in the winter."

Work-life balance: "There's not much life. In the summer it's always busy, unless it's a wet day. But we make up for it in the winter."

Best thing: "Extracting the honey. It's quite satisfying to know you've done it properly. You see the fruits of your efforts and of the bees' efforts."

Worst thing: "Cleaning out dead hives."

Quiz

1 Based on information in the article, which statement is TRUE?

- (A) A hive is home to thousands of bees.
- (B) A bee makes both honey and pollen.
- (C) Harries puts honey in bottles only during the summer.
- (D) Harries works the most with the bees during the winter.

2 Read the paragraph from the article.

He also sells bees to new beekeepers and helps them learn. His telephone rings all the time with people asking bee-related questions.

Which conclusion is BEST supported by the paragraph?

- (A) Harries does not like new beekeepers calling him.
- (B) It takes a very long time for a person to become a beekeeper.
- (C) New beekeepers do not do a good job of taking care of bees.
- (D) Harries is very knowledgeable about taking care of bees.

3 Based on the article, why is a spinning drum an important part of Harries' job?

- (A) It creates a noise that helps the bees produce more honey.
- (B) It protects the bees when the weather is bad.
- (C) It keeps the bees from stinging Harries when he gets the honey.
- (D) It helps Harries remove honey from the honeycombs.

4 Which section of the article explains the bottling process Harries uses for his honey?

- (A) Introduction [paragraphs 1-4]
- (B) "Without Bees, People Would Not Have Enough Food"
- (C) "Worker Bee Performs A Dance"
- (D) "Job Stats"