Bee Q&A **Ian Sturgess** **7th June 2026**

1. When bees are making a very loud noise around the hives, what does this mean?

A louder-than-normal hive can indicate several things. During warm weather and periods of heavy nectar collection, thousands of foraging bees may be leaving and returning, creating significant noise. Bees can also become noisier if they are disturbed, preparing to swarm, or reacting to changes in weather. Experienced beekeepers often learn to recognise the different sounds associated with normal activity and potential problems.

2. If bees are noisy, should nearby plot holders be more wary?

Not necessarily. A busy, noisy hive is often simply a productive hive. However, if bees are flying erratically, clustering outside the hive, or becoming defensive when people pass nearby, it is sensible to give them extra space. Most honey bees are focused on collecting nectar and pollen rather than stinging people.

3. Does the weather change bee behaviour?

Very much so. Bees are most active on warm, dry, calm days. Rain, strong winds, and low temperatures keep many bees inside the hive. Before storms, bees may become unusually active as they rush to gather resources. Hot weather can also cause bees to cluster outside the hive entrance to help regulate the hive's temperature.

4. What do you recommend to treat bee stings?

- Remove the sting as quickly as possible by scraping it away with a fingernail or card.
- Wash the area with soap and water.
- Apply a cold compress or ice pack wrapped in a cloth.
- Over-the-counter antihistamines or pain relief may help reduce itching and discomfort.
- Seek urgent medical attention if the person shows signs of a severe allergic reaction, such as difficulty breathing, swelling of the face or throat, dizziness, or collapse.

5. What should we do if we see a swarm of bees?

Remain calm and keep your distance. Swarming bees are usually at their least aggressive because they are focused on finding a new home. Do not disturb them, spray them, or attempt to move them yourself. Contact a local beekeeper or swarm collection service, who can often safely collect and rehome the swarm.

6. What happens to a bee if it stings someone?

A worker honey bee's sting is barbed. When she stings a human, the sting becomes lodged in the skin and is torn from her body when she flies away. The bee subsequently dies. Queens can sting multiple times but rarely do, and other bee species may have different types of stings.

7. Are some colours or smells particularly attractive to bees?

Yes. Bees are especially attracted to flowers that are blue, purple, violet, white, and yellow. They are also drawn to sweet floral scents. Strong perfumes, scented cosmetics, and some fragranced hair products can occasionally attract curious bees. Bees do not see the colour red well and are generally less attracted to it.

8. How many bees are in a typical hive?

The number varies throughout the year:

- Winter: around 5,000–15,000 bees.
- Spring: around 20,000–40,000 bees.
- Summer peak: often 40,000–60,000 bees or more.

A strong colony at the height of summer can contain over 60,000 worker bees, a queen, and several thousand developing brood.

9. What can we do on our plots to help bees thrive?

You can:

- Plant a variety of nectar- and pollen-rich flowers that bloom throughout the year.
- Grow herbs such as lavender, rosemary, thyme, and sage.
- Leave some areas a little wild.
- Avoid using pesticides whenever possible.
- Provide a shallow water source with stones or pebbles for bees to land on.
- Install bee hotels for solitary bees.
- Grow flowering fruit and vegetable crops that benefit from pollination.

10. How far can bees fly?

Most honey bees forage within 2–3 miles (3–5 km) of their hive, although they can travel much further if necessary. Distances of up to 6 miles (10 km) have been recorded, but bees generally prefer to collect food closer to home because it is more energy efficient.

Interesting Fact

Around one-third of the food we eat depends directly or indirectly on insect pollination, with bees being among the most important pollinators of fruit, vegetables, nuts, and many other crops. Their contribution to global food production is worth billions of pounds each year.