

Conservation of Resources through Bee Diversity



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Beekeepers of Afghanistan practising grafting for queen rearing

The natural environment can only be maintained in a healthy state through the interest and active involvement of local people. Beekeeping is a good way for people to earn an income without damaging the environment, at the same time honeybees and other pollinators play an important role in the conservation of plant resources by providing pollination services. These services also support diversification, which is necessary for the process of evolution. Much of the time, conservation of wild flora is an 'unnoticed' activity that happens under the cover of bush, canopy, and the darkness of the forest; pollinators participate by supporting the gene flow, which is a vital process of life.

Resource conservation is an important aspect of rural development activities and it also includes development programmes for bees like the Asian hive bee *Apis cerana* and other wild honeybee species. These activities and programmes mainly aim at conserving bee resources in a way that serves both poverty alleviation and biodiversity conservation. ICIMOD runs one such programme based on conservation apiculture, which focuses on improving the productivity of the Asian hive bee through selection and multiplication. Efforts are being made to involve beekeeping communities: farmers and beekeepers receive economic and social incentives to participate in the selection and multiplication activities. The communities have clearly benefited from this programme: at one of the project sites in Nepal, the number of farmers and beekeepers in the project has increased, and the selected bee colonies produce more honey. The Indian butter tree forest also benefited from this programme as social fencing provided by local beekeeping communities discouraged irresponsible logging of this important bee tree.

Pollination deficits and the need for more livelihood options often encourage farmers and entrepreneurs to rear butterflies and moths along with bees. This unique enterprise has a potential for growth as more people become involved in raising these beautiful insects for income generation and conservation. The conservation aspect of this effort is very strong, with people's attitudes towards these important pollinators changing rapidly from elimination to rearing and conservation. The growing trend in this enterprise has brought the natural beauty of these insect pollinators to people's homes in different forms, and market forces have capitalised on their unmatched beauty.