

Boon for bees on World Bee Day

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Due to the coronavirus lockdown, Delhi is witnessing an increase in the population of different bees

The COVID-19 lockdown has been a blessing in disguise for bees. The parks maintained by NDMC — Lodhi Garden, Nehru Park, Talkotara Garden, Children's Park, amongst others — are witnessing an increase in the population of all variants of bees (mason, carpenter bees, bumble and leafcutter bees that are solitary in nature), but particularly of honey bees that live together and make honey.

Confirming this piece of news on World Bee Day, May 20, S. Chellaiah, Director of Horticulture NDMC, says the lockdown has helped the bee population of this variant to multiply. "In NDMC parks, the population of honey bees has increased by more than 30%. Honey bees play a vital role in our food security," he says.

Ironically, this is not because of any special effort of NDMC staff, 50% of whom hail from U.P. and Haryana, and have not been able to report for duty. "We are blessed with more than 250 shrubs. The rich biodiversity is good for them."



Rakesh Gupta at work Special Arrangement

Agri-entrepreneur and bee-keeper Rakesh Gupta, says six bee hives have sprung up at Sunder Nursery during the lockdown. Gupta, who works with Golden Hive Foundation, says the reason is simple: when human interference is minimised, nature regenerates. Also, lower pollution levels have helped. "Bees can are now living and breeding in isolation," he says, not without irony. "We are not taking honey from the hives as the focus is on regenerating the bees. We do not want cause discomfort the bees."

Unlike Asiatic, mason, carpenter, leafcutter that are all solitary bees,

Honey bee is the social bee. It lives together and provides honey.

To work towards keeping bee populations up, Gupta's organisation, along with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture is planning to ensure the continuity of flowers after spring peters out and the harsh summer hits. "In summer we are focusing on sunflowers of the open pollinated variety. Sunflower has both nectar and pollen for the bees," he says, adding that they will be planted in a staggered way to ensure continuous supply.

"We are not taking honey from the hives," he says. "The focus is not on extracting honey, but on regenerating the bees."

At the nursery, *bajra*, *makka* (corn), *karipatta* (curry leaf), drumstick, basil and *baboon*, are also being planted. An eight-member team are presently working as bee conservators. They hail from the adjoining Nizamuddin Basti. "We are communicating with them through video calling, to explain how to handle bees during the summer months," he says.