

Spreading the goodness with a little help from our friends

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Sustainability is more than a buzz word at Sappi. We're invested in nurturing beneficial partnerships that help drive our vision of building a thriving world.



The winter-flowering commercial forestry eucalyptus trees are essential to the trapping and building of honeybee colonies prior to pollination season



Albert Malope, Tshagofatso Komane, Mke Allsopp and Thandiwe Theko

Sappi's business is one deeply rooted in sustainability, where the future of our industry and the forests we manage are ultimately interconnected. Today, we own and lease 394,000 hectares of sustainably managed forests in South Africa, with our operations having a far reaching, knock-on effect for people and planet.

Our commitment to championing healthy forests not only ensures that they're around for generations to come, but also plays a significant role in safeguarding the environment. Among other things, we depend on forests for clean air and water, providing a refuge for biodiversity, mitigating climate change, supplying raw materials, community upliftment, and, perhaps known to a lesser extent, they're a haven for honeybees.

We're taking a leaf out of Mother Nature's book and 'bee-friending' our local allies through partnerships with various beekeeping businesses. One such partnership is in the Lowveld of Mpumalanga with Bee Naked Honey Farms. Bee Naked shares our vision of sustainability, being a producer of raw local honey (distributed under the Eat Naked brand) and provider of pollination services to local farmers in the region.



By placing hives in our plantations, we're helping to bolster honeybee populations that provide vital pollination services to the region



Essential work has been created for people from local communities

By allowing Bee Naked Honey Farm beekeepers to place hives in our plantations, we're helping to bolster honeybee populations that provide vital pollination services to the region, while their honeybees work their magic benefitting our surrounding environment. But that's not all these busy workers do.

It's no secret the massive role these tiny creatures play in our food supply chain. Blueberries, raspberries, strawberries, macadamia nuts, avocados, litchis, apples, pears, plums, some apricots, almonds, cherries, melons, pumpkins, butternuts, kiwis, onion seed, sunflower seed, carrot and vegetable seed are but a few of the many crops to which we owe thanks to bees.

As Mike Allsopp, head of beekeeping at the Agricultural Research Council, explains: "While accurate data is limited, best estimates show that the demand for commercial honeybee pollination is set to increase by 15-20% per year in South Africa. When you consider that there are already not enough managed honeybees to meet SA's pollination demands, coupled with the fact that the amount of foraging territory available to honeybees continues to dwindle, it's easy to see why this spells trouble for not only our honeybees, but our food supply chain and the complex web of life they support."



Selby Mkgope, operational manager



The raw local honey is distributed under the Eat Naked brand

As demand for pollination services continues to grow, it's clear that every avenue must be explored under a united front if we're to sustain honeybee colonies. This includes the planting of cover crops in vineyards and other non-pollination dependent crops, the restoration of fallow land, the establishment of woodlots, and the planting of bee-friendly forages in verges and suburbia.

However, according to Allsopp, all these actions will only be enough if we're also able to protect and sustain two fundamental enablers of honeybee colony numbers in the country. Namely, the canola fields of the Cape in the late summer and the winter-flowering commercial forestry eucalyptus of the Lowveld and KZN. These two 'crops' are essential to the trapping and building of honeybee colonies prior to pollination season, allowing beekeepers to service the spring pollination needs of berries, macadamias, and all else.

Of the 394,000 hectares of Sappi-owned forests in South Africa, 163,000 ha or 63% comprises eucalyptus. That's roughly 30% of South Africa's eucalyptus output. Sappi therefore plays a pivotal role in the sustainability of honeybees and the pollination 'service' that they provide.

Without these two ‘pollination enablers’, the production of nearly all commercial crops needing pollination in South Africa would be in serious trouble. It begs the question, are all the key players, including the public, aware of the challenge at hand? We’d all be wise to do what we can to share this message far and wide.

As forests are important to the environment, our business and local communities, honeybees are vital to forest-dwelling fauna and flora – and vice versa. In a nutshell, bees need trees, and trees need bees. By teaming together with like-minded partners, we’re able to play a major part in sustaining honeybee populations, supporting our local honey industry and beekeepers, protecting our forests and, ultimately, having an even greater positive impact through our shared purpose: a thriving future for all.

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