

Training on conservation and promotion of indigenous bees (*Apis cerana*)

A delegation of 17 officers of the line departments and masters beekeeper from the northeastern state of Meghalaya underwent training for the rapid multiplication of *Apis cerana*- the indigenous Asiatic honeybee species at the Dr YS Parmar University of Horticulture and Forestry (UHF), Nauni. The seven-day-training was sponsored by the Shillong based Meghalaya Institute of Entrepreneurship (MIE) and focused on the rapid multiplication of *Apis cerana* queen bees. The objective of the training is to acquaint the participants, who are all beekeepers having 14-40 colonies each, in increasing the size of the *Apis cerana* colonies. Meghalaya does not have the European *Apis mellifera* honeybees. Senior entomologist and programme coordination Dr Harish Sharma said, "The species (*Apis cerana*) is very valuable for pollination for small-scale beekeeping. These are also well adapted to local conditions especially the mountain areas."



"The problems in this species with respect to its management, fast multiplication and behavioural problem like absconding can be largely addressed by having a young and prolific queen in a colony and its replacement on a yearly basis. This can be achieved by selecting better performing colonies and production of a large number of queens through mass queen rearing", said Dr. Sharma. The university has expertise in mass queen rearing of *Apis cerana* and *Apis mellifera*, both important bee species. On the request of MIE, this training is being conducted where besides scientific beekeeping management, participants will be specifically trained in mass queen rearing.

Why *Apis Cerana*?

It is the native bee, which is the predominantly found in India, Pakistan, Nepal, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and mainland Asia. These mountain bees are found everywhere in natural conditions and are ideal for stationary small beekeeping. Earlier, beehives on the outside walls of traditional mountain homes were a common sight. These bees are cold hardy and resistant to diseases like Varroa mite which affect *Apis mellifera*. In Himachal Pradesh, the beekeeping under *Apis cerana* is largely under traditional hives in most villages. However, its stationary rearing has fallen since the arrival of *Apis mellifera*. Experts feel that there is a great potential for its promotion as these bees are very frugal and can survive with minimalistic availability of flowering trees. They also suggest an urgent need to conserve these species because besides honey they provide invaluable services to different kinds of bee-pollinated plants in an around the apiary. Keeping this in view there is a specialized focus on protection and conservation of these native bees under the Himachal Pradesh Horticulture Development Programme (HPHDP) and the All India Coordinated Research Project going on at the university.