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Bee Vets: Opportunities, Challenges and Limits

A recent survey carried out in US and published in Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association examined the relationship between veterinarians and honey bees, highlighting the need for more education and a stronger relationship with the beekeeping sector.

By Matteo Giusti

Honey bees are livestock animals, producing food and other materials that can be used also for pharmaceutical and cosmetic products. Despite this, veterinarians are still not sufficiently involved in beekeeping.



Checking on the frame. (Photo by: [Mats Hagwall](#) from Lund, SWEDEN)

This represents an important gap for honey bees' health and food safety, resulting from a lack of education, professional skills, employment opportunities and appropriate regulation.

As highlighted by Apimondia, across the world, veterinary curricula often lack comprehensive mandatory theoretical and practical training in honey bee health. In Europe 75% of veterinary schools provide only minimal education in beekeeping, and in US vet education on bees' health is only now beginning to develop, as demonstrated by the case of the Michigan University. Furthermore, in US veterinarians began to be involved in beekeeping related issues only from 2017, through changes to the Code of Federal Regulations involving the US FDA Veterinary Feed Directive.

But veterinarians are really interested in beekeeping? And if so, how can they become involved, and what are the main limits and barriers to working in this sector?

A recent survey carried out in US and published in Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association examined the relationship between veterinarians and honey bees.

The study proposed an on-line questionnaire distributed across the US and collected 1,387 answers among veterinarians, veterinary technicians and students, precisely 879 veterinarians, 256 veterinary technicians and 200 veterinary students.

The questionnaire explored interest in honey bee health, barriers, limits and challenges for vets in the beekeeping sector.

The results are interesting. More than half of the veterinarians (60.3%) and veterinary medicine students (53.5%) as well as nearly half of the technicians (49.4%) indicated that they were either extremely or moderately interested in working with beekeepers in their practice. Instead the current situation is quite different. A total of 81.8% indicated they had never received a request to help honey bees or beekeepers, and 73.5% did not know how to write a prescription for honey bees.

About the practical experience and knowledge of honey bees, 62.5% of respondents has never handled a honey bee hive before and 39.5% has no background with bees.

Regarding the bees' diseases, 30,8% didn't know anything about them, 57,8% has said to just hear about honey bee diseases, and only 11,5% confirmed to be able to identify honey bee diseases and be comfortable with diagnostic techniques.

Regarding the barriers for approaching the honey bees, the main issue was the lack of knowledge, reported by more than 40% of the respondents. Other barriers included the lack of access to bees or beekeepers, questioning the need for bee veterinarians, no intention to practice bee medicine, lack of time to offer services or learn new species, business viability, confidence and comfort working with bees, allergy to bees, and finally the afraid of bees or physical problems.

Barriers for Bee Vets

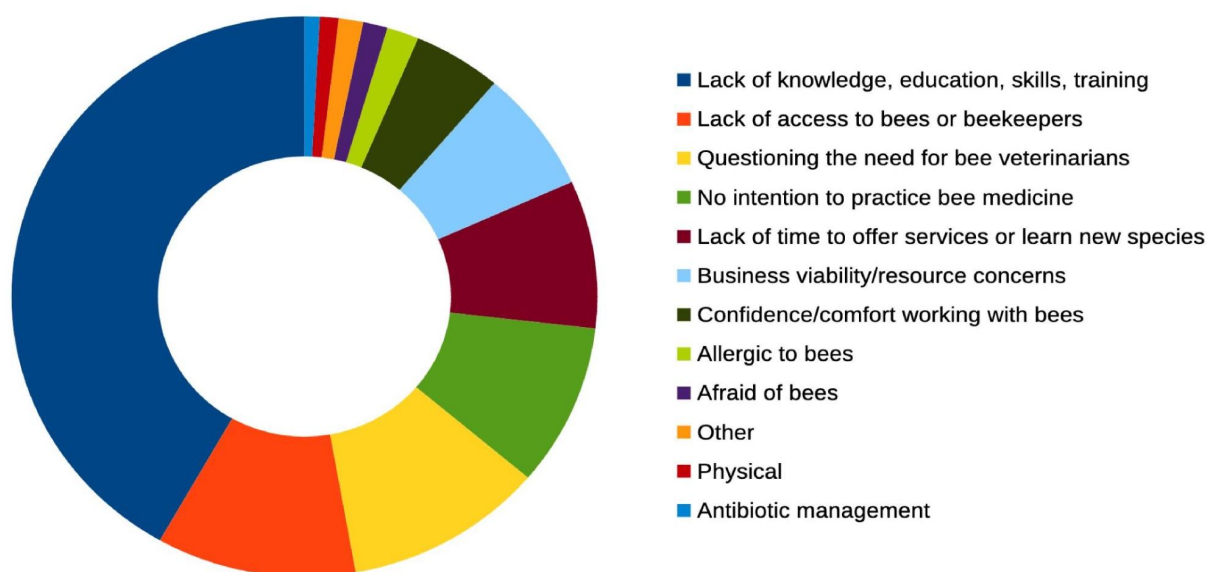


Chart with the percentage of answers about the barriers of veterinarians for approaching to beekeeping related issue.

However, more than 80% of veterinarians indicated that having access to training on diagnostics, interacting with veterinary medicine professionals who work with beekeepers, having standard operating procedures, or having veterinary formularies on



honey bees would definitely or probably increase the likelihood that they would take on more beekeeping clients.

The results of the survey provide a mixed picture of how veterinarians view honey bee medicine as a potential new area of practice. Veterinarians can offer a new voice to this discussion from a welfare perspective, supporting honey bees' health and beekeepers' work. The journey has just begun.

References

Wilkins et al., 2026 - [Honey bee medicine: a lack of knowledge, education, skills, and training identified as the most commonly cited challenge for veterinary medicine practitioners.](#)