
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

How can we help wild bees?



This is not a word-for-word transcript.

Phil

Hello, this is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Phil.

Beth

And I'm Beth. Do you like honey, Phil?

Phil

Hmm, I use it a lot in cooking, so yes.

Beth

Well, the relationship between humans, honey and the bees which make it goes back thousands of years. Prized for its taste and medicinal properties, in ancient times honey was known as 'liquid gold'. But now, thanks to modern farming methods, populations of many insects, including bees, are in decline. Saoirse, a worried listener from London, called BBC World Service programme CrowdScience about the problem.

Saoirse

I'm Saoirse from the UK and my question is: can honey help save bees? I've been **vegan** for about nine years and I don't eat honey myself, but I still have **a question mark** around it because I know that our bee populations are declining.

Phil

Saoirse is a **vegan** – someone who doesn't eat anything which comes from animals. Not just meat, but things like milk, eggs and honey too.

Beth

Although Saoirse doesn't eat honey herself, she says there's **a question mark around** eating honey. The phrase **a question mark around something** means there's doubt or uncertainty about something. And what Saoirse is uncertain about is whether eating honey might actually save bees.

Phil

So, would it be better for declining bee populations if more people ate honey? That's what we'll be discussing, using some useful new words and phrases. Plus, you'll find all the vocabulary from this episode on our website, bbclearningenglish.com.

Beth

But bee-fore that I have a question for you, Phil. The buzzing sound bees are famous for is made by flapping their four wings incredibly fast, but how fast? Do honey bees flap their wings:

- a) 90 times per second,
- b) 190 times per second, or
- c) 290 times per second?

Phil

Well, I have absolutely no idea, so I'm going to guess 190 times per second.

Beth

OK. Well, we'll find out the answer later in the programme.

Phil

We've been talking about honey bees, but these are just one of the 20,000 species of bee which exist around the world. In fact, honey bees are one of the most widespread insects on the planet and not endangered at all.

Beth

But the picture isn't so good for wild bees, including the bumblebee, as biologist Dave Goulson, from the University of Sussex, explained to BBC World Service programme CrowdScience:

Dave Goulson

In the UK, we have 26 bumblebee species but three have gone extinct. Many of the others are now **clinging on** in little **isolated pockets** of good habitat. Honey bees have beekeepers to look after them, but nobody's looking out for the wild bees.

Phil

Three of the 26 species of British bumblebee have gone extinct, and Dave says other species are **clinging on**, meaning barely continuing to survive with great effort. This happens in **isolated pockets** – small areas of habitat in which a particular insect or animal can survive.

Beth

So, while honey bees may not be endangered, lots of other bee species are, and this is bad news because we rely on insects to pollinate crops and to keep ecosystems functioning.

Phil

That's right, Beth. 87% of all plant species need insects for pollination, so without them most plants on Earth would disappear, which would obviously be catastrophic. But according to Dave Goulson, pollination is just one of the many things bees do for us, as he explained to BBC World Service's CrowdScience:

Dave Goulson

That isn't the only thing that insects are doing and there are much less glamorous, less well-known things, like recycling cow poo and helping to keep the soil healthy and helping to control crop pests and so on, all of which are also really important. And we, kind of, **take them for granted** or are just **oblivious** that they're even happening.

Beth

Recycling cow poo and keeping the soil healthy are two important jobs bees do which we **take for granted**. If you **take something for granted**, you fail to value or appreciate something which benefits you. We humans are **oblivious**, meaning unaware or unmindful of the many things bees do to support life on Earth.

Phil

So, while eating more honey probably won't do much to save wild bees, there are things you can do, such as growing bee-friendly plants which flower in spring, like lavender.

Beth

OK. Phil, I think it's time to reveal the answer to my question. I asked you how many times bees flap their wings per second. You said 190, which was... the correct answer. Well done!

Phil

Ooh!

Beth

OK, let's recap the vocabulary we've learnt, starting with **vegan** – someone who doesn't consume any animal products.

Phil

If you say there's **a question mark around something**, you mean there's some doubt or uncertainty about it.

Beth

If an animal species is **clinging on**, it's holding on to existence with great effort.

Phil

Isolated pockets refer to small areas of habitat in which a particular insect or animal can survive.

Beth

To **take something for granted** means to not appreciate or show gratitude for something which helps you.

Phil

And finally, the adjective **oblivious** means unaware. Once again, our six minutes are up, but if you're keen for more then head over to our website, bbclearningenglish.com, and download the worksheet and try the quiz on this episode. Goodbye for now.

Beth

Goodbye!

VOCABULARY

vegan

person who does not consume animal products such as meat, eggs, milk or honey

a question mark around/over (something)

used when there is doubt or uncertainty about something

clinging on

(idiom) continuing to survive or exist with great effort

isolated pockets

small areas of habitat in which a particular insect or animal can survive

take (something) for granted

fail to value or appreciate something which benefits you; not show you are grateful for something

oblivious

unaware; unmindful