

## Keswick Island Bee Site

The purebred bees in these hives are of the Caucasian species. When compared with most other bees, which are yellow with dark stripes, this breed has a dark body with silver stripes. Caucasian bees are bred for their special characteristics of high productivity, due to their long tongues for obtaining nectar, as well as their quiet nature. However, like all bees, they will react to strong odours including personal toiletry perfumes and insect repellents, and will sting if disturbed or aggravated by those in their flight path. Please move quickly past the site to ensure minimum disturbance.

To avoid spread of diseases, such as Varroa mite, which has decimated hive populations worldwide, quarantine restrictions do not allow direct importation of bee queens to Australia. These Caucasian bees were brought to Keswick Island in 1986 and are free of diseases which are endemic on mainland Australia. Periodically, mated queens are removed from the hives here and are used as breeding stock by many beekeepers from South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland.

The main advantage for using an isolated island for breeding bees is to ensure the natural pure mating of the queen bees in order to maintain the genetic line. A queen bee mates in flight with 12-15 drones within an 8 km radius of the hive. Keswick Island is far enough away from the Queensland coast to ensure queens mate with drones only from these hives on Keswick Island. By naturally mating queens, only the most vigorous drones are able to mate and thus the colony inherits superior hive vigour compared to those using artificial breeding programs.

Depending on seasonal conditions the bees periodically produce honey. Keswick Island honey tends to be a very dark red colour due to the floral resources on the island, which is a combination of blue gum, tea tree, mangrove, grass tree, coconut, poplar gum, bloodwood and numerous shrubs and weeds which grow on Keswick and St Bees Islands.

Keswick Developments encourage this beekeeping operation as a means of preserving a valuable part of the natural ecosystem. Bees have inestimable value in pollination of plants and many plants are entirely dependent on bees for their reproduction. As Albert Einstein pointed out “If the bee disappeared off the surface of the globe then man would only have four years of life left. No more bees, no more pollination, no more plants, no more animals, no more man.”

### Beekeepers

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