

So far we have regarded pollen from a botanical point, but the question arises, what use do our bees put it to? In order to answer this we proceed to the hive. On close observation we notice, even with the naked eye, that pollen varies very much in colour. Here we see a worker bee just alighting on the board at the entrance of the hive, carrying pellets of bright yellow. Just a little further on we see another with blue pellets, and close at hand one with cream pellets, next to her another with orange, brown, green, and so on.

Amongst many of the earlier beekeepers who were not so well acquainted with matters concerning the hive this pollen was supposed to be material which bees gathered to make wax for comb-building. In those days, when skeps, boxes, and suchlike receptacles were used as a domicile for bees, there was really little hope of finding out what bees really did with the pollen, such hives being a veritable closed book. With, however, the vast improvements made in the methods of keeping bees, in properly constructed hives with movable frames, the closed book has been unsealed, thus affording a wonderful amount of food for thought.

As we withdraw a frame from the modern hive we admire the beauty and regularity of those fragile and marvellously constructed six-sided cells. On closer observation we see larvæ in all stages of development, and find that the pollen which the bees have brought in from the fields has been deposited in quite a large number of the cells, stored for future use, and kept moist by the addition of a little honey. When in this condition it is often spoken of by many beekeepers as bee-bread. Pollen is a nitrogenous food used by the adult bees, as well as the nurses, who use large quantities to rear larvæ.

It is a well-established fact that a dearth of pollen-bearing flora in spring retards brood-rearing considerably. Whenever this is noticed the wideawake beekeeper usually supplies this want by placing pea-meal flour or rye-meal in small boxes in a sheltered, sunny place.

Pollen which has been damaged by early frosts often proves injurious to bees, disarranging the digestive system and often terminating with dysentery. Pollen-grains in honey will give it a cloudy appearance. Pollen in honey is also liable to cause fermentation.

Pollen-grains, infinitesimal though they seem, are the mighty atoms that the world is dependent upon, and without their aid no creature could exist.