

Studies on Foraging behaviour of honeybees on flowers of rapeseed crop

Abstract

This paper represents foraging behaviour of honeybees on the flowers of rapeseed crop; *Apis cerana indica* started foraging at 07.10hr and ceased their foraging activity at 17.25hr. Thus, the duration of foraging activity was 10.15hr which was maximum foraging period, followed by *A. florea* (08.00hr to 05.00hr and 09.00hr) and *A. dorsata* (07.50hr to 03.00hr and 07.10hr) respectively. *A. c. indica* spent maximum time of 6.57 ± 0.43 sec/flower followed by *A. dorsata* 6.55 ± 0.26 sec/flower and *A. florea* 4.4 ± 0.27 sec/flower. Maximum number of flowers visited by *A. dorsata* of 11.3 ± 2.3 flowers/ min then *A. c. indica* of 9.7 ± 2.6 flowers/ min and *A. florea* of 6.3 ± 1.2 flowers/ min.

Keywords: Foraging, honey bee, rapeseed, *A. cerana indica*, *A. dorsata*, *A. florea*

Introduction

Pollination is an essential process in maintaining a healthy and bio-diverse ecosystem. Pollination not only improves the yield of the crop, but it also contributes to uniform and early pod setting (Abrol, 2007). It increases the yields in the number of pods, seed per pod, seed weights per plant (Atmowidiet *al.*, 2007). Insect pollination is the most economic and important to increase the yield of crops (Tara and Sharma, 2010; Sushi *et al.*, 2013). Various insect groups play an important role in pollination of different agricultural, horticultural and medicinal herbs crops. It belongs to the orders hymenoptera, diptera, coleoptera, lepidoptera, thysanoptera, hemiptera and neuroptera (Free, 1993; Kearns *et al.*, 1998; Mitra and Parui, 2002; Mitra *et al.*, 2008). Bees are best pollinator because of suitable body size, hairiness, thoroughness, steadfastness, floral constancy and its populations (Stewart, 2002).

Honeybees have also been documented as the most frequent visitors of rapeseed flowers (Free and Nuttall, 1968). They visit rapeseed flowers for collection of both pollen and nectar which results into florets cross pollination (Williams, 1994; Sharma *et al.*, 2004). The act of gathering pollen and nectar from bee flora is known as foraging behavior for the production of honey.

Earlier few works has been reported to be done on the foraging behaviour of honey bee and its role in pollination of rapeseed in different places by some research workers (Eisikowitch, 1981; Longridge and Goodman, 1982; Fries and Stark, 1983; Prasad *et.al.*, 1989; Free, 1970). But it has become increasingly clear that the pollination needs of a crop species vary greatly with locality concerned where it is grown (Free, 1970). It is therefore, necessary to study the foraging behaviour of honey bees under the agro climatic conditions and also the role of honey bee in the quantity and quality of rapeseed production.

Materials and Methods

The field experiment was conducted at Binjagiri Agriculture Research Station, Chhatabara, Bhubaneswar, IAS, SOADU during *Rabi* 2022 on rapeseed was Sushree. The experiment was laid out in RBD with 4 treatments (viz., T1-OP with spray application of honey 5% solution, T2-

OP with spray application of sugar 10% solution, T3-OP with spray application of jiggery 10% solution and T4-OP without spray) and 5 replications. Observations on frequent visit of insect pollinators and honey bees to the rapeseed flowers were recorded daily on per square meter area of open pollinated (without spray) plot for 5 min at 09.00, 11.00, 13.00, 15.00hr during peak flowering period. Observations on the foraging behaviours of the bees were made on control plot without any spray on the daily time of initiation and cessation of foraging, total duration of foraging activity, peak foraging hours, number of flowers visited per minute by one bee, time spent on flowers at different hours of the day.

The foraging speed of honey bees was recorded in terms of time spent in second on a single flower by the insect forager collecting either nectar or pollen on the flowers of rapeseed crop at two hourly intervals starting from 9.00AM to 3.00PM during peak blooming period consecutively for 5 days from open pollinated plot. Foraging rate was assessed on the basis of number of flowers visited by an individual forager per minute of time at two hourly intervals starting from 9.00AM to 3.00PM during peak blooming period for 5 days from open pollinated plot. Pollen foragers were recognized by observing pollen load situated on hind leg baskets. For recording nectar foragers when bees protruded their proboscis for collecting nectar at the base of ovary, such bees were recognized as nectar forager. The pollen and nectar foraging time was noted for various bee species.

Results and discussion

Foraging speed of honeybees

Foraging speed (time spent in seconds on a single flower by the insect forager collecting either nectar or pollen) of different bee species on *B. nigra* flowers was recorded during peak blooming period at different day hours and presented in Table 1 and Fig.1. On an average, maximum foraging speed was observed by *A. c. indica* (6.57 ± 0.43 sec/flower), *A. dorsata* (6.55 ± 0.26 sec/flower) and *A. florea* (4.4 ± 0.27 sec/flower). However, the time spent on a single flower was higher for *A. c. indica* (7.04 s), *A. florea* (4.80 s) at 11.00 am and by *A. dorsata* (6.84 s) at 9.00 am of the day hours.

In an earlier study carried out by Kumar *et al.* (1994) revealed that *A. mellifera* exhibited higher foraging speed than solitary bees on mustard flower. More recently, Kunjwalet *al.* (2014) reported that *A. ceranaindica* spent more of 3.10 s in Kranti variety than *A. mellifera* (2.23 s) and *Adorsata* (3.03 s) in EC399313 variety. According to them *A. mellifera* showed maximum foraging speed which was more or less similar at 12.00 pm and 2.00 pm, 2.25 s and 2.24 s respectively while *A. cerana* at 4.00 pm (0.74 s). For *A. dorsata* it was observed highest at 2.00 pm (1.05 s) whereas *T. laeviceps* had a maximum foraging speed of 9.88s at 12.00 pm.

Foraging rate of honeybees

The foraging rate (number of flowers visited by an individual forager per minute of time) of different bee species on *B. nigra* flowers was recorded during peak blooming period at different day hours (Table 2 Fig. 2). On an average foraging rate of different bee species

observed in the present study was highest with 11.3 ± 2.3 flowers/ min by *A. dorsata*, 9.7 ± 2.6 flowers/ min by *A. c. indica* and 6.3 ± 1.2 flowers/ min by *A. florea*.

Considering the number of flowers visited/ min by honeybee species at different day hours, *A. dorsata* and *A. florea* covered maximum flowers of 12.9 – 13.5/min and 6.3 – 8.1/min respectively during 9.00 to 11.00 am. Whereas *A. c. indica* was found to visit more number of flowers per minute (11.5 – 12.5) during 11.00 am to 1.00 pm. It was observed that during the peak activity of *A. dorsata* there was a transient decrease in *A. c. indica* activity. This is due to the asymmetric interspecific competition, which could cause *A. cerana indica* to move its peak activity later (11:00am-1:00 pm) than *A. dorsata* (9.00 -11.00am).

Abrol and Kapil (1996) at Hisar, India, found that the foraging rates of different bee species varied greatly in different oilseed crops. On an average, *A. florea* visited 4.2 to 8.5 flowers per min in different cruciferous crops and 10.2 in sunflower, whereas *A. dorsata* visited 4.9 to 13.5 flowers per min in cruciferous crops. Rana *et al.* (1997) observed higher foraging activity at 12.00 hr of both *A. mellifera* and *Ac indica* than at 09.00 hr. However, in both the species, there were no significant differences in the population of bees between 12.00 and 15.00 hr. Kunjwalet *al.* (2014) revealed that the overall mean of foraging rate of insect pollinators observed in the study was highest with 11,48 flowers/min by *A. mellifera*, 2.09 flowers/min by *A. cerana*, 4.03 flowers/min by *A. dorsata* and 1.93 flowers/min by *T. laeviceps* at 12.00 pm. However, in our observations higher number of bees of *A. dorsata* was observed than *A. cerana indica* followed by *A. florea*. *A. mellifera* was completely absent in our investigation in rape seed crop.

Foraging period of honeybees

The data regarding commencement and cessation of foraging time of honeybee species is presented in Table 3. The foraging period of *A. c. indica*, *A. dorsata* and *A. florea* was 10.15 hrs, 7.10 hrs and 9.00 hrs respectively with peak activity during 11.00 am to 1.00 pm for *A. c. indica*. and 9.00-11.00am for *A. dorsata* and *A. florea*. In addition, *A. cerana* began its diurnal activity earlier (07:10 h) and ended later (5.25pm *i.e.*, 17:25 h) than *A. dorsata* (07:50h and 3:00pm (15.h), respectively). Their period of activity was influenced by weather parameters like temp of 21.38°C and relative humidity of 76.73% during growth period as evidenced by earlier findings of Mahfouz *et al.* (2012), Roy *et al.* (2014) and Osman *et al.* (2016).

Table 1: Foraging speed of honeybee species on flowers of the rapeseed crop during peak blooming period

Honeybee pollinators	Time spent in second/flower/honeybee*				Mean ± SD
	9:00 AM	11:00 AM	1:00 PM	3:00 PM	
<i>A. cerana</i>	6.80	7.04	6.36	6.08	6.57 ± 0.43
<i>A. dorsata</i>	6.84	6.68	6.44	6.24	6.55 ± 0.26

<i>A. florea</i>	4.36	4.80	4.28	4.16	4.4 ± 0.27
<i>A. mellifera</i>	00	00	00	00	00

*Mean data of 5 days observations at 5 locations

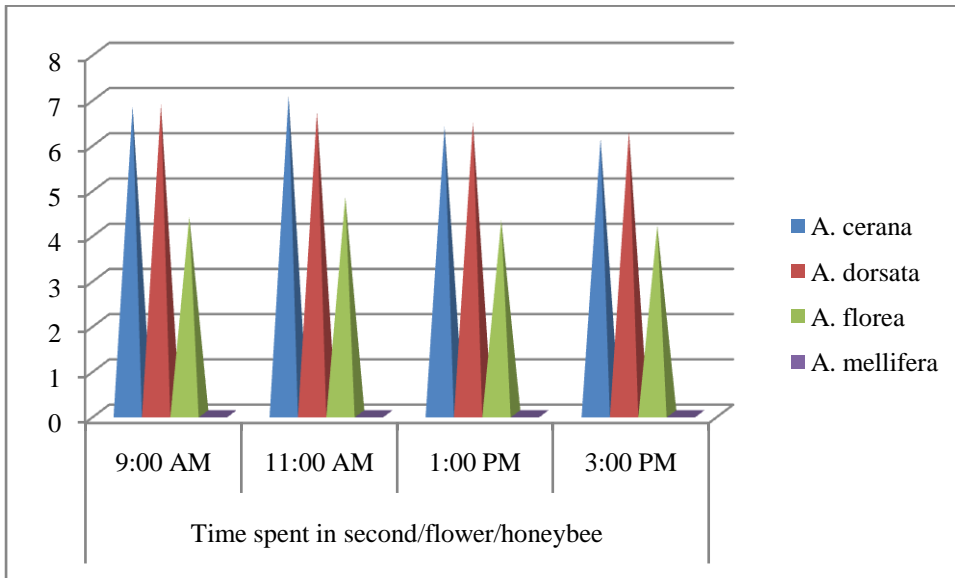


Fig. 1: Foraging speed of honeybees on flowers of rapeseed crop at different day hours

Table 2: Foraging rate of honeybee species on flowers of rapeseed crop during the peak blooming period

Honeybee pollinators	Number of flowers visited/min/honeybee*				Mean ± SD
	9:00 AM	11:00 AM	1:00 PM	3:00 PM	
<i>A. cerana</i>	7.8	11.5	12.5	7.1	9.7 ± 2.6
<i>A. dorsata</i>	12.9	13.5	10.4	8.7	11.3 ± 2.3
<i>A. florea</i>	6.3	8.1	5.7	5.4	6.3 ± 1.2
<i>A. mellifera</i>	00	00	00	00	00

*Mean data of 5 days observations at 5 locations

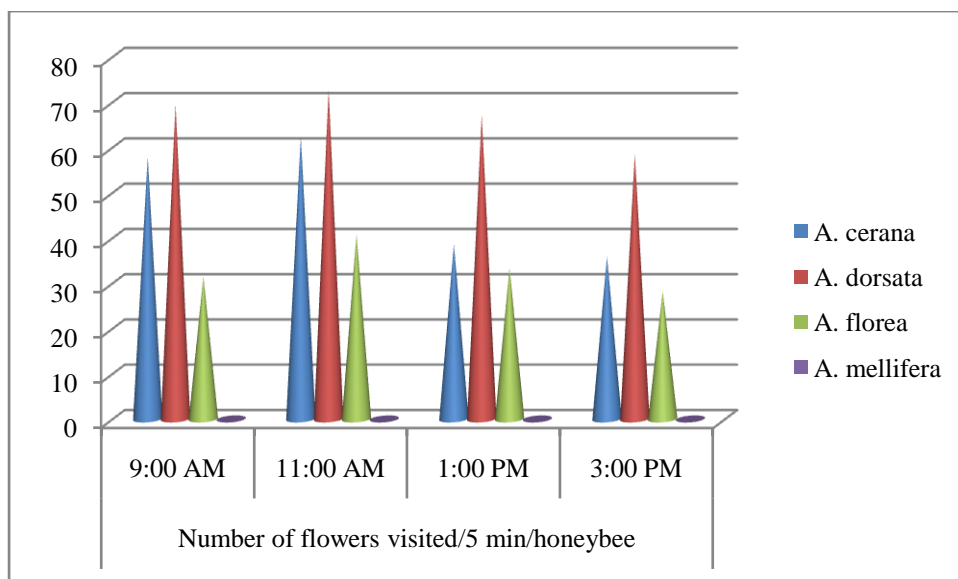


Fig. 2: Foraging rate of honeybees on flowers of rapeseed crop at different day hours

Table 3: Foraging period and peak period activity (Commencement and Cessation) of honeybee species on flowers of rapeseed crop

Honeybee pollinators	Period of activity		Duration (hrs.)	Peak activity	Weather Parameters
	Commencement (AM)	Cessation (PM)			
<i>A. cerana</i>	7.10	5.25	10.15	11.00 AM - 1.00 PM	Temp.°C - 21.38.°C RH (%) - 76.73
<i>A. dorsata</i>	7.50	3.00	7.10	9.00 AM - 11.00 AM	
<i>A. florea</i>	8.00	5.00	9.00	9.00 AM - 11.00 AM	
<i>A. mellifera</i>	-----	-----	-----	-----	

*Mean data of 5 days observations at 5 locations

Conclusion

On an average, maximum foraging speed was observed by *A. c. indica* (6.57 ± 0.43 sec/flower) followed by *A. dorsata* (6.55 ± 0.26 sec/flower) and *A. florea* (4.4 ± 0.27 sec/flower). However, the time spent on a single flower was higher for *A. c. indica* (7.04 s), *A. florea* (4.80 s) at 11.00 am and by *A. dorsata* (6.84 s) at 9.00 am of the day hours. The foraging rate was highest with 11.3 ± 2.3 flowers/ min by *A. dorsata*, 9.7 ± 2.6 flowers/ min by *A. c. indica* and 6.3 ± 1.2 flowers/ min by *A. florea*. Considering the number of flowers visited/min by honeybee species at different day hours, *A. dorsata* and *A. florea* covered maximum flowers of 12.9 – 13.5/min and 6.3 – 8.1/min respectively during 9.00 to 11.00 am. Whereas *A. c. indica* was found to visit more number of flowers per minute (11.5 – 12.5)

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The foraging period of *A. c. indica*, *A. dorsata* and *A. florea* was 10.15 hrs, 7.10 hrs and 9.00 hrs respectively with peak activity during 11.00 am to 1.00 pm for *A. c. indica*, 9.00-11.00am for *A. dorsata* and *A. florea*. In addition, *A. cerana* began its diurnal activity earlier (07:10 h) and ended later (5.25 pm i.e, 17:25 h) than *A. dorsata* (07:50h and 3:00 pm (15.h). Their period of activity was influenced by weather parameters like temp of 21.38°C and relative humidity of 76.73%.

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