

Beerhives and Booze Bees

These are the structures made by the ‘booze bee,’ (*Apis mellifera mirabilis*) which is a new species of honey bee spreading through the southeastern United States and Caribbean. Beerhives are noteworthy mostly for the unique nature of their honeycombs, which are *saturated* with ethyl alcohol. About a pound of Beerhive honeycomb can be mixed with a gallon of water to produce an extremely tasty alcoholic beverage called ‘bee-beer’ (it’s even mildly carbonated). Strictly speaking, bee-beer isn’t actually beer, but not many people really care; and the ones that do care don’t really *mind*. It tastes great and has a nice kick to it, which is the important thing.

Why the booze bee? Why do they need to secrete alcohol infused honeycombs? *How* do they secrete alcohol infused honeycombs? Well, sure, many specialists in the field are working on that very question, even now. The rest are trying to work out how to accommodate the very existence of booze bees. The basic problem is that public opinion on the status of North American bee populations in general is, to put it mildly, *fraught*: so, in the USA, BATFE (which feels that it should be handling the situation, because alcohol) is glaring at the USDA, and the USDA

(which feels that it should be handling the situation, because bees) is glaring right back, and both sides have proxies ready if not eager to fight it out in the private sphere.

All of this is necessary to understand why all those people in rural areas who make moonshine have now also taken up beekeeping. Bee-beer by itself is worth quite a bit; and since booze bees make excellent pollinators, it can surprisingly difficult for law enforcement officials to get a search warrant in order to disturb “a critical species’ habitat.” That in itself is not a particular issue, but illegal distillers are not the *only* people who like to do their thing out in the wilderness. Smugglers, ritual killers, apocalyptic cults, demon worshippers: the list of groups up to no good and ready to discourage casual looks by law enforcement is long, and having a few beerhives around is an excellent, plausible explanation for why people are being so furtive, over there in the back forty. Besides, even followers of the Demon-Lord of the Bitter Harvest can appreciate a good glass of bee-beer.

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