

AFFINITIES AND DISTRIBUTION OF BEES OF SRI LANKA

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Bees (Hymenoptera:Apoidea) are important as pollinators. Bees of the world consist of 16,325 species in 425 genera and 8 families. A recent major study conducted in 29 selected sites enabled the recording of 138 species of bees in 35 genera and 4 families and their distribution within Sri Lanka. The objective of this publication is to highlight the affinities of the documented bees in relation to the world distribution of bee taxa and also to present the distribution of bees within the country.

According to published information on bee genera, 10 of the 35 bee genera documented from Sri Lanka are cosmopolitan in distribution and the rest are shared with the Oriental and Ethiopian Regions. Apart from the cosmopolitan genera, 9 different genera are shared with the Australian and Palearctic Regions while 3 other genera are shared with the Nearctic Region.

With respect to species, 18 species of bees are shared with the Indian Region excluding India, while 24 species are common to both India and Sri Lanka. Of them, 22 species are strictly confined to Sri Lanka and India. Of the documented bees, 21 species do not occur elsewhere according to published information and hence can be considered as endemic to Sri Lanka. The endemic bees are ground nesters largely confined to higher altitudes reflecting their evolution in isolation.

Low country Dry Zone recorded the highest number of species (77) followed by Low Country (64 spp.) and Mid country (65 spp.) of the Intermediate Zone and the Mid-country Wet Zone (65 spp). The middle peneplain recorded 102 species with 22 species confined to it. The upper peneplain (914-2458m) has 6 species of ground nesting endemic bees confined to it. Of the 10 different habitats, agricultural habitats had the highest number of bee species. The number of visits made to each of these regions differed depending on their proximity and may have a bearing on the total number of species collected.

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