

Tea tree honey points to higher antioxidant levels, anti-microbial activity: study

Xinhua, November 8, 2018

SYDNEY, Nov. 8 (Xinhua) -- Honey from bees foraging on tea trees is higher in antioxidants and displays sustained anti-microbial activity compared to other honeys, helping to shed new light on the insects' links with the major food source, according to a latest research.

"We found bees foraging on Melaleuca trees produced a honey that combines immediate anti-oxidant activity and a significant sustained anti-microbial activity even in young honey, without having to wait for the honey to mature," Southern Cross University researcher David Rudd said on Thursday.

His study found that the tea tree honey combined "strong immediate anti-oxidant activity significantly higher" than generic honey - or those from more common floral sources - and revealed how foraging on the plant benefited the honeybees, said Rudd.

"A diet of Melaleuca trees is slightly different to what bees usually feed on so we wanted to conduct gut microbe analysis in case there were any problems for the bees, but we found the slight changes in the gut suggested the bees could handle tea tree really well and actually gives the bees a slightly higher immune function, making them more resistant to bacterial infections and viral infections without affecting the gut metabolic function," he said.

The tea trees "actually acted as a probiotic for metabolism, increasing beneficial immune defensive bacteria while maintaining nectar metabolism bacteria within the honeybees' gut."

The study covered tea tree plantations in the Bungawalbyn Valley region of Australia's New South Wales state and during the research trials, the trees were provided to the honeybees as a diet supplement, with the insects also allowed to naturally forage throughout old growth plantations, according to the university.

The findings are expected to help improve the production, handling, storage and other aspects of honey from bees foraging on tea trees, it said. Enditem

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