The Effect of Pollen Substitutes on the Productivity of *Apis cerana* in Indonesia


The aims of this study were to examine the preferences and productivity of *A. cerana* colonies when fed on a variety of pollen substitutes.

**Introduction**

Beekeeping with *Apis cerana* Fab. has been traditionally adopted and is a part of natural heritage of some communities in West Java, Indonesia. Although *A. cerana* are poor honey yielders, they require low cost management and technology; they are adapted to cope with pests, diseases, and predators (Verma, 1998; Joshi et al., 2002; Pokhrel et al., 2006; Hishashi, 2011), and require no medication (Verma, 1998; Hishashi, 2011). Small scale beekeeping operations benefit from *A. cerana* (Joshi et al., 2002). Substitutes for pollen are necessary during periods of pollen dearth to provide the required nutrients thereby preventing colonies from absconding as well as maintaining healthy and productive colonies (Standifer et al., 1977; De Jong et al., 2009; Saffari et al., 2010). Providing pollen substitute for honey bee colonies also resulted in greater comb building, greater brood rearing, stronger colonies and greater hive storage (Pokhrel et al., 2006).

*A. cerana* colonies are kept traditionally in the apiary in Bandung, West Java using hives without movable frames. *Apis cerana* build combs parallel to each other. Productivity in *A. cerana* colonies can be measured by counting the number and circumference of the combs before and after experiment. The measurement of combs could only be done at night, in order not to interfere with the activities of the honeybees.

Pollen substitute is a protein rich mixture of honeybee diets with no added pollen. The most popular formula for a substitute is soy flour, dry brewers’ yeast and dry skimmed milk (Haydak, 1967;

**Materials and Methods**

The basic ingredients of the pollen substitute were soy flour (hexane extracted and vacuum heated afterwards), skimmed milk powder and yeast. The yeast *C. hawaiiana* CR015 was deposited in the University of Indonesia Culture Collection (UICC). Yeast cells on Yeast-Extract Malt-Extract Agar (YMA) inoculated in Yeast-Extract Malt-Extract Broth (YMB) prepared for production of biomass. Lyophilisation technique was used for dry yeast biomass.

A brand of bakers’ yeast containing *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* was used as commercial yeast for comparative purposes in pollen substitute. To make pollen substitute patties *A. cerana* honey from the apiary, water or sugar syrup 50% (w/v) were added. Four local pollen substitutes i.e. PS-A, PS-B, PS-C, PS-D and an imported pollen substitute (PS-E) were prepared for the honeybee colonies and the ingredients are presented in Table 1. The nutritional values of pollen substitutes powder i.e. protein, carbohydrate, fat, and ash were analyzed. The
nutritional information of the imported pollen substitute was taken from the label on its packaging.

The experiment was carried out in an apiary at Ciburial Village, Bandung, West Java, Indonesia (Fig. 1) in January-March 2012 over a period of seven weeks. Eighteen A. cerana colonies, were used in this experiment. Each type of pollen substitute was fed to groups of three colonies, and the final three colonies were used as a control. The colonies were not given sugar syrup, and were allowed to forage on flowers around the apiary during the period of observation.

Every week, 40 g patties of pollen substitute were given to each colony. The consumption of pollen substitute was measured by weighing once a week. The patties were placed just below the comb on yellow, thick, plastic cartons measuring 20 x 20 cm and were easily accessible (Fig. 2). The consumption data per week, per colony were used to determine the preference of the bees for a particular substitute. The comb circumferences were measured, using a tape measure, before and after treatment. Another measure of productivity was by the colony’s weight showing the amount of honey production. The honey was harvested by cutting the honeycombs, then squeezing and filtering to separate the honey from the wax before weighing.

Results
Table 2 presents data on the nutritional value of all the pollen substitutes. Four local pollen substitutes contained high protein, higher than PS-E, the imported pollen substitute. All four local pollen substitutes in general contained lower carbohydrate and fat content compared to PS-E. Ash values of pollen substitutes were in the range of 2.69%–3.11%.

Table 3 presents data on the percentage consumption of four local and imported pollen substitutes per colony, per week, for seven weeks. The mean percentage consumption of pollen substitute PS-A and PS-D were significantly higher (p < 0.05) than PS-C. The total mean percentage consumption of pollen substitutes for PS-A, PS-B, PS-D and PS-E were not significantly different (p < 0.05).

Table 4 presents data on the percentage comb circumference increase for colonies, the colony’s weight increase percentage, and honey yield of A. cerana colonies fed on pollen substitute for seven weeks. All of the total increase of comb circumference, increase in colony weight, and total mean honey yield were not significantly different (P < 0.05).

The mean increase in colony weight, comb circumference and honey yields for colonies fed on PS-A, PS-D, and PS-E were higher than those of PS-B and PS-C. The increase of colony weight and honey yield was highest in colonies fed on pollen substitute PS-A.

Discussion
The need to develop a local pollen substitute is important for A. cerana in Indonesia where a dearth of pollen sometimes occurs during the long dry season or the rainy season. Artificial feeding during this period is necessary. Pollen substitutes with a low cost, good nutritive value, acceptable for the honey bees and easy to prepare by beekeepers themselves are essential in the local A. cerana static beekeeping system.

In this study we processed soy flour to increase fat and deleted the anti-nutritional factor in soy flour. The nutritional values of defatted soy flour were 58.88% protein; 30.16% carbohydrate; 1.74% fat; and 3.25% ash. To increase the nutritional value of the substitute we added dried skimmed milk and dried yeast. Skimmed milk was reported to fortify the amino acids in pollen substitute. There have been a few reports on the use of soy flour as an ingredient in pollen substitute. (Haydak, 1967; Standifer et al., 1978; Somerville, 2000; Manning, 2008; Pokhrel et al., 2006; Prakash et al., 2007; Silag and Gupta, 2011). Our reports showed good results and soy flour was recommended for its protein content and low cost.
Yeast has been reported to play an important role in the nutrition and health of honeybees. We also expected that local yeast would process the pollen substitute into bee bread. Pollen substitutes PS-A with added C. hawaiiana CR015 - a local yeast associated with A. cerana were expected to be palatable to the colonies. *Candida hawaiiana* CR015 was isolated from *Br. suaveolens* stamens, and this species was also found on pestil of *Br. suaveolens*, the pistil of *Calandra calcithyrsus*, and in the pollen of *Mimosa pudica* around the apiary in pollen substitutes. All flowers were frequently visited by *A. cerana* during foraging. Gilliam (1979) stated that the shift in the quality of bee bread is attributed to a micro-organism associated with the honey bee.

Akratanatul (1990) stated that there was no mixture or substitute that can totally replace fresh pollen which has various trace elements important for the honeybee. Our study showed that protein, fat, carbohydrate and ash content of local pollen substitutes were in the range of those of various natural pollens. Our analysis showed that the protein content of all pollen substitutes was high (44.31%-51.31%) and so satisfied the honey bee requirement for protein. Some natural pollens with less than 20% crude protein cannot satisfy a colony’s requirements for optimum production (Somerville, 2000). Pollen quality and quantity affects bee longevity and the development of the hypopharyngeal gland (Manning, 2008).

Many studies have investigated worker bee preference for protein diets by measuring consumption. The reported consumption of protein in the diets varies widely (Brodtschneider and Crailsheim, 2010). According to these studies, the protein content of pollen from different species and regions also varies widely from 2.5%-61% (Roulston et al., 2000)

All of our local pollen substitutes contained low fat - less than 2%. Imported pollen substitute contained 3.90% fat. Several references suggest that the fat content in pollen substitutes should be 5%-7% or lower (Haydak, 1967; Black, 2006). Manning (2008) however stated that the soy flour protein concentrate with low fat content (0.6% lipid) gave honeybees a greater life-span. In various flower species the lipid content of pollen was in the range of 0.8%-8.9% (Roulston et al., 2000).

Ash revealed inorganic elements and important minerals for the honeybee. Ash content in our local substitute powder was in the range of 2.69%-3.11%. Herbert and Shimano (1978) reported the ash of pollen samples in nature was in the range of 2.4%-3.4%.

Carbohydrate content in substitute powder was in the range of 38.49%-48.04%. We did not examine the kind of sugar and other carbohydrate’s component of the pollen substitutes.

Sihaq and Gupta (2011) reported the use of soy flour with a composition of 42.0% protein, 3.5% fat, 6.5% ash, sugar 37%. They stated that such substitutes and supplements could induce the A. mellifera colonies to continuously produce and rear more brood and forage for more pollen and nectar.

Consumption is a good first indication of the acceptance of supplementary diets (Brodtschneider and Crailsheim, 2010). In our study, the consumption of local pollen substitute (PS-A, PS-B, PS-D) and imported pollen substitute (PS-E) were not significantly different (Table 3). The scent, taste, and particle size of the local pollen substitute (except PS-C) were attractive and readily acceptable to the honey bees in the colonies of our study.

Pollen substitute PS-C was consumed the least during the seven week period (Table 3) which showed that PS-C was not as attractive to *A. cerana*. PS-C contained the basic ingredients, soy flour, dried skimmed milk and sugar syrup only. Consumption of local pollen substitutes mixed with honey from the apiary were higher than PS-C. Palatability can be inferred from acceptability. Acceptability was measured by the amount of material taken from the feeders. Honeybees are not expected to take non-palatable materials back to the hive unless they are starving (Saffari et al., 2010).

An indicator for the productivity of an *A. cerana* colony in a traditional hive was comb circumference. All *A. cerana* colonies fed on pollen substitute during the experiments built new cells in old combs or built new combs. Comb can be either brood comb or honeycomb which stores honey and pollen. A lot of protein is needed by honeybees for heavy wax production. All of the local pollen substitute in our study containing high protein gave high wax production. The bees also re-used less comb, tearing down old and building new wax regularly (cerana means ‘wax maker’). Although the increase total mean of comb circumferences was not significantly different, the mean increase of comb circumferences of colonies fed on pollen substitute PS-A, PS-D, and PS-E were three to four times higher than in the

Fig. 2. The same hive photographed on 30 January 2012 (left) showing small circumference comb and pollen substitute on plastic tray. The photo (right) was taken on 15 March 2012 showing increased circumference comb and stronger colony.
control colonies (Table 4). Haydak (1967) stated that a sustainable nutrient can be observed by the building activity of the colonies. Somerville (2000) reported that wax glands use a lot of protein. Pokhrel et al. (2006) reported that comb building was highly correlated with brood rearing, honey storage, and pollen storage. Hishashi (2011) stated that A. cerana queens lay eggs only in newly built cells.

Although the total mean percentage of increase in the colony’s weight was not significantly different (P < 0.05), the highest mean increase in weight was in colonies fed on PS-A was more than two times that in the control colonies (Table 4).

Although the total mean honey yield was not significantly different (P < 0.05), the highest mean honey yield was in colonies fed on PS-A, four times than in the control colonies (Table 4). A colony’s weight was total weight of combs, brood, honey, bee bread and adult honeybees. Honey production was affected by a number of worker honeybee which foraging for nectar.

The substitute consumption data (Table 4) showed that the substitute containing baker’s yeast (PS-B) were favoured by A. cerana colonies. The nutritional value of PS-B was similar to other substitutes. PS-B contained S. cerevisiae which could lead to the fermentation of the honey in pollen substitute patty. Pereira et al. (2013) reported that fermentation of honey contains ethanol and volatile compounds esters isovaleryl acetate, ethyl octanoate and ethyl hexanoate. In our study, A. cerana workers preferred PS-B, because it smelled of volatile compounds. The honeybee consumed PS-B, but the ethanol it contained was toxic. Abramson et al. (2008) reported that some bees that consume ethanol become too inebriated to find their way back to the hive, and will die as a result.

The highest mean increase weight was in colonies fed on PS-A and it was similar to the highest mean increase of honey yield. Although the mean increase of comb circumferences colonies fed on PS-A was not the highest.

Conclusion
This study revealed that the substitute containing Candida hawaiiana CR015 (PS-A) was much preferred by the A. cerana colonies and gave the highest productivity. It could be considered as good as imported pollen substitute.

Acknowledgements
The authors gratefully acknowledge the financial supports received from Ministry of Education Republic of Indonesia ( Hibah Program Kompetitif Nasional / Hibah Perubahan Strategis Nasional) (2010-2011), and from University of Indonesia ( Hibah Riset Pasca sarjana U) Tahun 2011).

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