Jammu: The lockdown due to coronavirus has posed a grave challenge to the migratory beekeepers, who chase blossoms from one state to another, and they are looking for support from both the administration and the people to keep their trade alive.

Many of the apiarists have reached different parts of Jammu region from outside the Union Territory and are planning to move with their bee colonies towards Srinagar in the next couple of weeks as is the traditional practice.

“This was the time when we used to come back from outside (Jammu and Kashmir) after the winter sojourn... this time we are facing the heat of the lockdown and are hoping the administration as well as local residents will facilitate our movement and cooperate in setting up apiaries,” Farooq Ahmad Wani, president of Golden Honey Beekeepers Association, told PTI.

Wani, 47, who is a resident of Tethar village of Banihal in Ramban district, is camping at Battal village near Mansar Lake along with several other beekeepers from his district, who have returned from Rajasthan since early last month.

He said the beekeepers traditionally move outside Jammu and Kashmir, especially to Rajasthan and Punjab, in December every year and return in March-April to Jammu before moving to Kashmir in the last week of April.

We came early this time but others were not so lucky and are still stranded in Punjab and other places. The rising temperatures pose a danger to the bees and we need to move from place to place for their safety and also to ensure good quality feed, he said.

He said livelihood of tens of thousands of people, directly or indirectly linked to the honey trade, is at stake.

Another beekeeper, who did not wish to be named, complained that the local residents in many areas are reluctant to allow them to set up their colonies after entering Kathua district from Punjab.

Recently, one of our vehicles carrying beehives from Punjab was stopped at Lakhanpur for hours together before being given a clearance by the authorities. Only the driver and one attendant were allowed, while others were sent to the administrative quarantine, he said.
He said people of a village along Jammu-Pathankot highway objected and did not allow setting up of the shelter due to fear of coronavirus.

“We are already following the guidelines of the government, staying in isolation and maintaining proper social distancing. The people need not to worry, just allow us to set up bee colonies on reaching our destinations, Wani said.

He said there is a threat to the lives of the bees without proper care.

We faced a lot of problems due to the lockdown and the inclement weather, resulting in huge losses. The government needs to come forward and bail us out with financial assistance, marketing director of Golden Honey Qasim Umar said.

He said they have already taken up the matter with the director of agriculture department and are hopeful of a positive response from the government.

Wani, who has over 300 bee colonies, said he had allowed many of his workers to visit their homes after reaching Jammu but most of them could not join them due to the sudden lockdown.

The frequent rainfall added to our worries in Jammu the production of honey went down and we are also not getting proper price for the product as there are people who are trying to exploit the situation in their favour, he said.