The Honey Industry in South Africa

Beekeeping in South Africa

South Africa has about 100 commercial beekeepers with approximately 80,000 colonies. These beekeepers are responsible for 98% of all the pollination services in South Africa and 60% of the country's honey harvest. There are also about 1,100 small-scale beekeepers with 35,000 colonies. All these colonies are in frame hives. South Africa is number 33 on the world list of honey producers and is also a big importer of honey: 231,961 tonnes of honey imported annually, mostly from Argentina, China and Zambia. The demand for bee pollination services is growing each year and so is the pressure on honey production. The industry needs at least 60,000 colonies each year for pollination of fruit crops and 20,000 for seed production.

South African Bee Industry Organization (SABIO)'s role

SABIO represents all aspects of the honey bee industry in South Africa. It is the custodian of the list of registered beekeepers who are producers of honey or involved with fruit pollination. SABIO caters for the interests of bottlers and packers of honey and other bee products, as well as equipment manufacturers. SABIO is involved in training future beekeepers and the implementation of guidelines for food safety and correct packaging of honey.

SABIO also publishes a quarterly journal and organises the Annual Bee Congress for South Africa.

What is the biggest problem affecting beekeeping in South Africa?

There is uncontrolled honey importation. We have a lack of natural food resources for bees to allow expansion of beekeeping operations and to improve honey production.

How can ApiTrade Africa and other international organisations help?

By establishing a good and strong trade network within Africa and marketing the unique African honey to the rest of the world. Also by fostering the sharing of skills and good techniques within the continent ensuring the sustainable use of forage for bees and maximised harnessing of bee products. People in Africa must receive proper training and follow up programmes so that beekeeping projects reach the highest success rates of all projects in Africa.

Beekeeping is the best way to create jobs and improve living conditions, especially in Africa, with all its natural bee habitats. ApiTrade Africa and other development partners need to establish a market for the produce.

And finally?

“BEES - The cornerstone of food security for the future.” ApiTrade Africa will be a key player as global leaders consider how to feed the world - with help from the innumerable hard workers that we call the honey bee. I am looking forward to being part of that.

From An interview with Theunis Engelbrecht, Chairman of SABIO. BfDJ acknowledge ApiTrade Africa’s The African Honey Magazine (Issue 012, March 2013) as the source of this article.

Celebrated Bee Tree Killed

The famous century-old Tualang bee tree at Pedu Lake, Malaysia has featured several times in BfD Journal. Due to its importance to the honey bee ecosystem – as home to generations of Apis dorsata honey bees and sustainably harvested by generations of honey hunters - the tree has remained in place while almost all surrounding forest has been cleared by logging.

Someone has now debarked the bee tree as ‘revenge’ for highlighting the plight of the honey hunters. This means that the tree will certainly die. A recent TV documentary highlighted the deplorable state of clandestine logging activities around Pedu Lake and it appears that the tree has become a political issue.

I have visited this Bee Tree almost every year since 1983, first with Pak Teh Lebah the celebrated honey hunter, and following his death in 2009, with his grandson, Nizam. The tree is a legacy from Pak Teh and its value is far more than dollars alone. It means so much more than honey and bees, and has helped to build camaraderie, friendship, good will and research collaboration from all over the world.

It is hard to imagine how ignorance and political rivalry have yielded this incalculable loss: bees, people and trees are all hurt by this insensible act.

Dato Dr Makhdzir Mardan, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Malaysia

Further reading


The Bee Tree is the subject of a book for children which featured on the cover of BfDJ 83.

Visit www.beesfordevelopment.org/portal

Honey imports - EU Directives

Further to the reports on Fungicide residues bankrupt beekeepers in Vietnam in BfDJ 103 and 104 the follow up EU Directive Decision of 11 March 2013 regarding honey is:

“Vietnam has submitted a plan for honey to the Commission. That plan provides sufficient guarantees and should be approved.” Vietnam is therefore now included in the list permitting imports to the EU.

Bosnia Herzegovina is included in the list for the first time.

Pitcairn Islands have not provided a plan as required by Article 29 of Directive 96/23/EC and are therefore now removed from the list.

Further information: http://www.beesfordevelopment.org/portal/article.php?id=3050