

Learning from the Bees Conference

HONEYBEE LANDSCAPE HUMAN BEING

31st August to 2nd September
Netherlands 2018

*All day we leave and arrive at the hive,
concelebrants. The hive is love,
what we serve, preserve, avowed in Latin murmurs
as we come and go, skydive, freighted
with light, to where we thrive, us, in time's hum,
on history's breath,
industrious, identical . . . **

Why this conference?

- We are gathering in a spirit of hope and deep concern for the future of the honeybee and the entire pollinator system. What we do for the honeybee, we do for the entire natural world.
- We are coming together to celebrate the honeybee's enduring power to communicate with human beings and inspire us to pave new paths.
- It is our confidence in the wild bees' innate abilities that spurs our endeavour, and confidence in the transforming power of collaborating like bees do that gives us hope.
- We seek new forms of partnership to help the bees recover their innate resilience in a healthy and sustainable ecology.
- We rejoice at the prospect of meeting with people who have pollinators in their hearts and minds.

The picture now

- The many years of natural beekeepers' expertise with managed and wild bees worldwide - and now validated by recent findings of progressive independent science - point to a clear need to support honey bee conservation and rewilding measures, reduce "managed" honeybee colonies in regions of high density, and widely restore chemical free habitat and a diversity of nutrition.
- Unequivocal evidence of the severe harm caused by systemic pesticides, fungicides and herbicides to the world's flora and fauna as well as human health requires urgent address. The honeybees' suffering from the extreme degradation of the natural world is well documented and beyond dispute.
- Conventional/industrial and chemical based beekeeping practice exacerbates the problems. The honeybee must be freed wherever possible from economic paradigms and accorded a place in our culture that is worthy of its supreme importance to our lives.

- That bees respond well and rapidly to having their needs put before human convenience has been established beyond any doubt, so putting the bees' needs first is what we do.
- Current living conditions for pollinators in many places on earth are alarming and need concerted action that we aim to initiate.

Vision for change

- Beekeeping must be guided by sound principles of stewardship, of the bees and the land they subsist on. We advocate responsible, ecological bee guardianship. We seek to wrest control of the economic narrative from both agribusiness interests and the beekeepers who support unsustainable agricultural practices.
- For enduring change the bees' prosperity must become the guiding principle for all our interactions with the natural world.
- We aim for positive support of wild bee colonies by improving their habitat, distribution and diversity of food sources in the interest of building strong, locally adapted genotypes. These colonies would be unconstrained by the very narrow aims of human selection - primarily focussed on honey production and temperament - which have weakened stocks to the point where in many regions bees now require human interventions to keep alive.
- The severe degradation of the natural world over decades and the alarming decline of insect populations must be our human society's chief concern in order to safeguard all life on earth. Helping people understand how critical insects are to their individual lives is of prime importance.
- Priority must be accorded to organic/biodynamic, systemic chemical-free farming practice as well as reforestation and large-scale conservation projects aimed at enhancing food supplies for all pollinators. Appropriate co-operations with NGO's and other relevant bodies will be sought. By bringing together for the first time bee advocates of many different disciplines and from diverse regions of the world, the *Learning from the Bees* conference will lay the foundation for effective networking and strategic alliances to decisively move forward concerted action on behalf of the bees and other pollinators.

Who's coming?

- Contributors have come forward from the world of science, bee-centered beekeeping initiatives, charities, NGO's, honeybee conservation and environmental groups, artists, farmers and educators - representing a diverse and powerful group of notable bee advocates.
- All share an aspiration to develop strategies to move the bee-centered agenda forward across the world. We are fortunate in attracting some of the world's leading scientists and bee activists to this event and expect a huge leap forward in 'bee thinking', the formulation of coherent strategies for positive change.
- The conference will consist of presentations by international speakers on a variety of subjects including: honeybee health, ecological initiatives, innovative approaches to tackling environmental issues and the role of art in raising awareness.
- Countries represented in the *Learning from the Bees* endeavour so far include the USA, Australia, Canada, Germany, Austria, France, Czech Republic, Luxembourg, UK, Belgium, The Netherlands, Switzerland, Ireland, Turkey, Sweden and South Africa.
- The conference organisers are grateful for sponsorship to offer bursaries to representatives from poorer regions to take part.
- The event provides an opportunity to strengthen our international ecological network of individuals and organisations. This will enable us to learn from and share experiences with those working with all pollinators in a broad variety of contexts and to consider the ways in which we may collaborate on future initiatives.

We look forward to sharing the findings of our conference with the public by means of a publication documenting the interdisciplinary work of our contributors and outlining our long-term strategies for improving honeybee health and resilience.

* Excerpt from: *Hive*, Carol Ann Duffy, Faber Books