ŚWIAT I SŁOWO WORLD AND WORD
42 | 1 | 2024 ISSN 1731-3317
http://doi.org/10.53052/17313317.2024.20

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Be(e)ing Involved – Urban Beekeeping as a Vibrant Environmental and Cultural Movement in British Metropolitan Communities

Introduction

This paper aims to explore the development of the vibrant beekeeping movement in British cities triggered after 2006 by media publications of a threat to the continued existence of honeybees caused by Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD), loss of habitat, exposure to pesticides, and climate change. The uncertainty regarding the future of these pollinating insects has since become a cause for concern and one of the most salient ecological issues with its strong emotional resonance among urban residents in the United Kingdom and provoking a widespread movement across the country to counteract its detrimental effects. It appears that the urban beekeeping movement has become a significant integrating factor for its participants, providing them with a common identity and a sense of belonging to a community that shares ecological awareness. Identification with others, united by common ideas and values within a particular social network, seems increasingly important for contemporary city dwellers, who often feel alienated in their multicultural and rapidly changing urban communities.

To examine the grassroots and institutional response to the media's alarming reports and the growth of beekeeping communities in British cities, the author of this article has examined press and internet publications that

report on increasing public concern about the future of honeybees, such as blogs, the websites of apicultural societies, and local government policy statements on bee protection. Published interviews with amateur urban beekeepers and people who care about the welfare of these pollinators reveal not only their concern for the future of honeybees on our planet but also the increasing awareness of many city dwellers of the complicated relationship between humans and their biophysical environment, along with the sense of moral obligation to take steps to protect biodiversity in city ecosystems. Moreover, they testify to the emergence of urban beekeeping as part of an extensive cultural movement inspired by environmentalism, a worldview that in the last few decades has appeared to be an increasingly prominent feature of British urban communities and incorporates other activities, such as community gardening, urban homesteading, sowing urban meadows, planting green roofs, and brownfield revitalisation.

This article is not a quantitative research study based on statistical data gathered to determine the relationship between apiculture and developing pro-ecological behaviour. Its aim is instead to present the author's observations on a widely reported cultural phenomenon manifested by a large number of urban dwellers who, moved by the fate of the bees, have started beekeeping in their urban environment or have tried to create the conditions in which urban bee colonies can prosper, treating these activities, even if somewhat naively, as their contribution to 'saving the planet.' The findings presented in this paper are based on the views and opinions presented in the publications mentioned above.

Environmentalism and eco identity

Since the 1970s, environmentalism has been steadily gaining momentum as a potent political and social movement and as a worldview in many Western democracies. It has become a platform for criticising contemporary capitalist societies for their materialism, conspicuous consumption, wastefulness, and unfettered economic growth at the cost of other living organisms and the natural environment[1]. By offering an

[1] Marino Bonaiuto, Glynis M. Breakwell, and Ignacio Cano, "Identity Processes and Environmental Threat," *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 6 (1996): 158, https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1099-1298(199608)6:3<157::AID-CASP367>3.0.CO;2-W. Dave Horton, "Green Distinctions: 'The Performance of Identity among Environmental Activists'," (2003): 7, Academia.edu, accessed April 11, 2019, https://www.academia.edu/272237/Green_Distinctions_The_Performance_of_Identity_among_Environmental_Activists.

alternative value system, environmentalism has become a meaningful life choice for members of Western societies searching for what Zygmunt Bauman calls new 'communities of fate' or "groups of believers […] welded together solely by ideas or various principles."[2] August J. Hoffman and Stephen Doody develop this idea by arguing that "mutually supportive and highly interdependent relationships" characteristic of groups sharing interests, emotions, moral norms, and values, provide their membes with a much sought after "psychological sense of community."[3] The critique of the over-consumption of the world's resources and growing sensitivity to the detrimental effects of human actions on the biophysical environment have become potent identification markers and community-binding factors for the environmental movement's exponents and actors. It can also be observed that a growing number of people who are not environmental activists *per se* incorporate the 'green' effect into the choices they make and thus display a degree of eco identity. There is much speculation on what is involved in being an environmentalist, what one's motivation for pro-environmental behaviour might be, and what forms environmental identity adopts. Numerous studies suggest that the more consolidated environmentalism is in an individual's value system, the more likely they are to make environmentally friendly choices[4]. However, as contrarily indicated by some researchers, pro-environmental behaviour may not be explicitly related to environmental concerns but might be motivated by other psychological, financial, health, or social factors[5].

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[2] Zygmunt Bauman, *Identity. Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi*(Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004),11.

[3] August J. Hoffman and Stephen Doody, "Build a Fruit Tree Orchard and They Will Come: Creating an Eco-Identity Via Community Gardening Activities,"(2013): 4, Academia.edu, 2019,https://www.academia.edu/6496301/Build_a_Fruit_Tree_Orchard_and_They_Will_Come_Creating_an_Eco-Identity_via_Community_Gardening_Activities [access 11.04.2019].

[4] Joanne Dono, Janine Webb, and Ben Richardson, "The Relationship between Environmental Activism, Pro-Environmental Behaviour and Social Identity," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 30, no. 2 (2010): 179, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2009.11.006 [access 10.04.2019]. Birgitta Gatersleben, Niamh Murtagh, and Wokje Abrahamse, "Values, Identity and Pro-Environmental Behaviour," *Contemporary Social Science* 9, no. 4 (2012): 377, https://doi.org/ 10.1080/21582041.2012.682086 [access 2.04.2019]. Mark R. Leary, Kaitlin Toner, and Gan Muping, "Self, Identity, and Reactions to Distal Threats: The Case of Environmental Behavior," *Psychological Studies* 56, no. 1 (2011):161, https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1007/s12646-011-0060-7 [access 2.05.2019]. Sarah Riggs Stapleton, "Environmental Identity Development through Social Interactions, Action, and Recognition," *The Journal of Environmental Education* 46, no. 2(2015): 94, https://doi.org/10.1080/00958964.2014.1000813 [acceess 20.03.2019].

[5] Lorraine Whitmarsh, and Saffron O'Neill, "Green Identity, Green Living? The Role of Pro-Environmental Self-Identity in Determining Consistency across Diverse Pro-Environmental Behaviours," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 30 (2010): 306, https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1016/j.jenvp.2010.01.003 [access 21.11.2019].

There is an abundance of sociological and psychological theories that set out to explain the correlation between personal moral motivation and environmental sensitivity. One is Shalom Schwartz's moral norm-activation theory of altruism, which posits that a combination of two factors activates altruistic pro-environmental behaviour: awareness of the destructive consequences of our conduct to the biophysical environment and a moral obligation to take countermeasures.[6] Accordingly, this tends to lead to a shift from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric (or biocentric) worldview. The former is based on the assumption of the intrinsic uniqueness of human beings, sustained by their social and cultural values and evolutionary superiority over other living organisms, which are regarded as irrelevant. This presupposition results in a false sense of disconnection from nature, its instrumental treatment as a means to human ends, and futile attempts to assume dominion. While this "I-It relationship"[7] has allowed human beings to accomplish much, the toll on global biodiversity and humans themselves has been tremendous[8]. Ecocentrism exposes the fallacy that human beings exist apart from nature because of their uniqueness. This worldview utilises a holist, organicist perspective that views human beings as part of nature, one of its numerous interdependent species and objects, which all have meaning and value in the system. Those who hold the ecocentric view believe that human beings must act considerately towards environmental forces, respect their constraints on human affairs,[9] and "treasure all forms of biological and cultural diversity."[10]

Embracing an ecocentric perspective is the first step towards acquiring an 'ecological self' (ecological identity), a concept introduced in 1987 by the Norwegian philosopher and environmentalist Arne Naess. It is achieved

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[6] Shalom H. Schwartz, "Normative Influences on Altruism," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 10 (1977): 221–279, https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60358-5. Dono, Webb, and Richardson, "The Relationship," 179. Gatersleben, Murtagh, and Abrahamse,"Values, Identity," 375. Jan E. Stets, and Chris F. Biga, "Bringing Identity Theory into Environmental Sociology," *Sociological Theory* 21, no. 4 (2003): 400, https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1467-9558.2003.00196.x.

[7] Charles Scott, and Simon Fraser, "Ecological Identity through Dialogue," *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education* 15 (2010): 137, https://cjee.lakeheadu.ca/issue/view/51.

[8] Timothy Ingalsbee, "Earth First! Activism: Ecological Postmodern Praxis in Radical Environmentalist Identities," *Sociological Perspectives*39, no. 2 (1996): 267–268, https://doi.org/10.2307/1389312. Stets, and Biga, "Bringing Identity Theory," 409.

[9] Ingalsbee, "Earth First," 267-268. Stets, and Biga, "Bringing Identity Theory," 409.

[10] Alan Drengson, and Bill Devall, eds., *Ecology of Wisdom. Writings of Arne Naess* (Berkeley CA: Counterpoint, 2008), 55.

through the realisation that our relationships extend beyond the human community, and we are "in, of and for Nature from our very beginning."[11] Val Plumwood and Mitchell Thomashow further expound this idea. They argue that only by departing from the neo-liberal "atomistic self-enclosed self" and embracing a "relational self"[12] will there be the adoption of emotional, ethical, and cognitive capacity in which "Nature becomes an object of identification."[13] According to Thomashow, this implies that "people construe themselves in relationship to the earth,"[14] with this being manifested in their conduct, moral compass, and sense of self. Another ramification of this worldview is the acknowledgement that human life experience "transcends social and cultural interactions,"[15] as people enter into and are entangled in a web of intimate and intricate relationships with other animate and inanimate constituents of the global ecosystem[16]. So reciprocity of human-nature relationships becomes a salient characteristic of ecological identity, continuously sustained by our awareness that all human actions that affect the ecosystem will provoke a counter-reaction.

Human-bee relations

The working relationship between humans and bees has a long history. Extensive evidence of early human-bee contact can be found on almost every continent, with prehistoric cave paintings in Africa depicting honey hunters smoking honeybees out of their nests, and the archaeological remains of ancient apiaries in the Mediterranean Basin dating to the 10th–9th century BC both proving that in antiquity apiculture was by no means confined to rural areas, with bee stewardship commonly practised within town limits too.[17]

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[11] Arne Naess, "Self-realisation: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World," *The Trumpeter* 4, no. 3 (1987): 35, https://trumpeter.athabascau.ca/index.php/trumpet/article/view/623 [access 13.04.2019].

[12] Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (New York: Routledge,2002), 78.

[13] Mitchell Thomashow, *Ecological Identity: Becoming a Reflective Environmentalist* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), 3.

[14] Thomashow, *Ecological Identity*, 3.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Lisa Kretz, "Ecological Identity in Education: Subverting the Neoliberal Self," *Leadership and Research in Education: The Journal of the Ohio Council of Professors of Educational Administration (OCPEA)* 1(2014): 8, https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1088528.pdf. Leary, Toner, and Muping, "Self, Identity," 162.Thomashow, *Ecological Identity*, 3 [access 1.02.2021].

[17] Alison Benjamin, "In Defence of the Solitary Bee," *The Guardian,* August 7, 2011, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2011/aug/07/projects-to-encourage-solitary-bees. Stephen Buchmann, *Letters from the Hive: An*

The intimate relationship that developed between the two species benefited and continues to benefit human beings in innumerable ways. As long ago as in antiquity, bees were integral to human life. In return for providing their stewardship, humanity reaped the benefits of the bees' labour, using honey and wax for numerous purposes and rituals – from sweetening and food preservation to making cosmetics and medicines, dyeing fabrics, shipbuilding, and religious ceremonies. The Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans believed that honey was the food of the gods, and they made honey offerings to their deities by placing containers of the substance next to the bodies of their dead.[18] Human reliance on bees made them the focus of attention and care from their keepers, who from the earliest times tried to create conditions in which bee colonies would prosper and continue their productive work.

Both our welfare and our future are inextricably linked to the honeybee's pollinating services and their continued productivity. That is why when, in 2006, world attention was drawn to Colony Collapse Disorder, honeybees became an important biopolitical subject and a global concern on the agenda of scientific organisations and international bodies such as the United Nations. CCD is a phenomenon that had previously occurred sporadically throughout the history of apiculture, but by 2006 the rate of collapse of honeybee colonies had reached unprecedented levels. As many as 50% of all bee colonies in the United States were affected, and beekeepers reported to have lost 30–90% of their hives.[19] Similar losses were reported in other countries too. In the face of mounting evidence from across the world, beekeepers, scientists, environmentalists, writers, and journalists united to raise public awareness of the scale of the problem and to warn the public about the consequences that human beings would suffer if the decline of bee colonies continued at such a pace. Numerous publications, such as *A World Without Bees* by Alison Benjamin and Brian

Intimate History of Bees, Honey, and Humankind (New York: Bantam, 2005),15. Lisa Jean Moore, and Mary Kosut, *Buzz. Urban Beekeeping and the Power of the Bee* (New York and London: New York University Press,2013), 101. Georgios Mavrofridis, "Urban Beekeeping in Antiquity," *Ethnoentomology: an Open Journal of Ethnoentomology and Cultural Entomology* 2 (2018): 53–54. Internet Archive.

[18] Benjamin, "In Defence.". Mavrofridis, "Urban Beekeeping in Antiquity," 53–54.

[19] United States Environmental Protection Agency, "Colony Collapse Disorder," https://www.epa.gov/pollinator-protection/colony-collapse-disorder#:~:text=Colony%20Collapse%20Disorder%20%7C%20US%20EPA%20Colony%20Collapse,for%20the%20remaining%20immature%20bees%20and%20the%20queen [access 12.07.2022].

McCallum (2008), made the reality of our reliance on bees and other pollinators clear by quoting Albert Einstein's ominous prophecy: "If the bee disappeared off the surface of the globe then man would only have four years of life left. No more bees, no more pollination, no more plants, no more animals, no more man."[20]

One may wonder whether we would empathise so much with bees and be concerned about their fate were they not part of our cultural heritage[21], the subject of anthropomorphication and stereotyping as well as our long-standing and intense fascination. We study the hive's social organisation, the colony's labour distribution, the meaning of bee rituals such as the bee dance, and their forms of communication. As a result, the bee has become entangled with humanity not only as a capable, productive agricultural subject but also as the subject of many literary works, metaphors, and cultural stereotypes through the ages. There is a long literary history, some of it depicting early human attempts to use domesticated honeybees for agricultural production, which includes instruction on bee stewardship, our fascination with the advanced social integration of bee colonies, and a reflection on the nature of the bee-human relationship. Bees feature in the Bible and the Koran as well as in fiction and poetry.[22] One of the earliest published poems on the life and habits of the bee is Virgil's "Georgics,"[23] depicting the parallels between bee and human societies. In many cultures, including the Western (Protestant) one, bees are synonymous with unselfish dedication to community welfare, hard work, and industriousness – highly esteemed features that these insects possess and that many would like to see more of in human society. This symbolism is utilised in a number of cultural contexts, for instance, in the honeybee mosaics decorating the hallway of Manchester Town Hall and the city's coat of arms – an aptly chosen motif for the city that was the engine of the British industrial revolution.[24] The social organisation of the honeybee has

[20] Tessa Burwood, "Urban Beekeeping in the Heart of Birmingham," *BBC Birmingham,* September 24, 2014, www.bbc.co.uk/birmingham/content/articles/2008/07/29/urban_bees_feature.shtml [access 9.08.2020].

[21] Sue Feary et al., "Earth's Cultural Heritage," in *Protected Area Governance and Management*, eds. Graeme L. Worboys et al.(ANU Press,2015), 87-99.

[22] Moore and Kosut, *Buzz,* 101.

[23] Catriona Sandilands, "Propolis: Three Forays into the Political Lives of Bees," in *Material Ecocriticism,* eds. Sernella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014),164.

[24] Ed Glinert, "A Brief History of the Manchester Bee," *Bee in The City*, beeinthecitymcr.co.uk/manchester-bee/ [access 9.08.2020].

been used as a metaphor to illustrate the relationships in human society at different stages of its historical development. For example, the queen bee ruling the hive was a symbol of the absolute monarchy, while the worker bees collectively working for the welfare of the whole colony were used by Marxist ideology to justify the communist idea of shared labour.[25] Thus, our deep-seated relationship with the bee is part of our cultural legacy.

The Beekeeping Movement in British Cities

Extensive media reporting on the sharply declining bee population in the UK and its consequences for humans and the whole ecosystem alarmed the public and caused a frenzy of interest in bee welfare. Bees became the new eco-concern, and a wide-ranging bee-saving crusade ensued, reminiscent of the Save the Whale campaign of the 1970s, the first large-scale effort to save an endangered species.[26] Individuals, institutions, and local government were encouraged to support the bee by creating bee-friendly conditions on private and public grounds and developing apiculture, not only in rural areas but also in the less obviously bee-friendly urban environment. Consequently, beehives started to spring up on rooftops and in the back gardens of private and public buildings, schools, offices, public parks, and private allotments. Among the famous city landmarks that host hives in Great Britain are Buckingham Palace, London Stock Exchange, Tate Modern, the Fortnum & Mason department store, and the Scottish Parliament Building.[27] In many areas, with the help and guidance provided by the British Beekeepers Association (BBKA), beekeeping has become thoroughly integrated into the school curriculum. For example, in cooking lessons, students use recipes that include honey; in geography, they study the significance of apiculture in different regions in the world; they also acquire business skills by advertising and selling honey from the school's hives. There are other benefits of incorporating the beekeeping programme – it has added "two extra 'r's' in the curriculum: respect and responsibility", which ultimately result in developing an ecocentric worldview. According to the headmaster of a primary school in Greenwich, the students learn respect for nature's different objects and develop environmental awareness

[25] Benjamin, "In Defence."
[26] Moore and Kosut, *Buzz,* 81.
[27] Benjamin, "In Defence."

and a more mindful attitude to the biophysical environment. Schools that have introduced beekeeping also note the "massive impact" it has had on challenging schoolchildren with behavioural or academic difficulties. This is an unexpected benefit, confirmed by the problematic students themselves. As one of them reported, "The bees made me peaceful and calm."[28]

The development of the grassroots beekeeping movement surpassed expectations, so much so that within a few years of the first press reports highlighting the bees' uncertain future, the British Beekeepers Association were able to report a nearly threefold increase in membership, from 8,500 in 2008 to 25,000 people in 2012, with membership since remaining at around this figure.[29] Novice beekeepers may seek instruction and advice from more than 60 local beekeeping associations working under the auspices of the BBKA.[30] By 2014 in London alone, ten such apicultural societies had appeared in different city boroughs.[31] It quickly turned out that the scale of initial interest exceeded capacity, and long waiting lists for beekeeping courses and membership ensued. For example, in 2009, an introductory course in London for aspiring apiarists was reported to have received almost 1,000 applications for just 60 places.[32] A similar trend was observed in Sheffield, Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle, and a host of other cities where courses for trainee beekeepers were brimming to the full[33]. The scale of public response to the threat to the honeybee is attested to by John Hauxwell, former chairman of the North London Beekeepers Association, who, in an interview with Alison Benjamin from *The Guardian*, said, "This level of interest is unheard of during my 35-year career, […]. We are now

[28] Fredrika Whitehead, "Beekeeping Takes Flight in Primary School," *The Guardian,* August 30, 2011, https://www.theguardian.com/education/mortarboard/2011/aug/30/beekeeping-in-schools [access 20.08.2020].

[29] Paolo Faccioli, "Beekeeping in London: Multiethnic, Multifloral, Pervasive, Enthusiastic,"*L'Apis—The Beekeeping Magazine* 3 (2014): 21, excerpt, accessed August 4, 2021, en.calameo.com/read/0024933538c5417271dbb. The British Beekeepers Association, "BBKA History – Post War Changes," https://www.bbka.org.uk/bbka-history-post-war-changes [access 25.07.2022].

[30] Brian McCallum and Alison Benjamin, *Bees in the City: The Urban Beekeepers' Handbook* (London: Guardian Books, 2011), https://www.google.pl/books/edition/Bees_in_the_City/4lxPxvGyXzEC?hl=pl&gbpv=1&dq=Bees+in+the+City:+The+Urban+Beekeepers%27+Handbook+by+Brian+McCallum+and+Alison+Benjamin&printsec=frontcover [access 18.08.2022].

[31] Faccioli, "Beekeeping in London," 21.

[32] Peter Jackson, "Is Urban Beekeeping the New Buzz?," *BBC News,* August 5, 2008, news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/8183425. Lisa Wright, "The Rise and Rise of Urban Beekeeping," *BBC News,* March 12, 2017, www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-38227113 [access 20.08.2022].

[33] McCallum and Benjamin, *Bees in the City.*

overloaded with novice beekeepers and we don't have the experienced ones to support and mentor them."[34] Concern about the dwindling numbers of honeybees was also channelled through lobbying MPs to increase government funding for honeybee protection and through the organisation of demonstrations. In November of 2008, hundreds of beekeepers and their supporters, some of them dressed in the characteristic protective coveralls, marched to 10 Downing Street to hand to the Prime Minister a petition with 143,000 signatures in which they demanded more support from the government.[35]

The rapid development of urban apiculture has spawned a proliferation of literature on bees. Novice and experienced beekeepers alike can choose from a wide array of books. Some publications, like *Bees in the City: The Urban Beekeepers' Handbook* by Brian McCallum and Alison Benjamin (2011) and *Beekeeping for Beginners: How to Raise Your First Bee Colonies* by Amber Bradshaw (2019), are step-by-step guides. They provide practical information on how to get started, and teach the fundamentals of modern beekeeping, such as the best location for the hives, the equipment needed, pests and diseases, swarm management, and even include a calendar for novices of the jobs that need to be done to maintain their colonies' well-being. Other books, e.g., *Buzz. Urban Beekeeping and the Power of the Bee* by Lisa Jean Moore and Mary Kosut (2013), *The Good Bee. A Celebration of Bees – And How to Save Them* by Alison Benjamin and Brian McCallum (2019), and *The Little Book of Bees* by Hilary Kearney (2019) offer a broader perspective by giving insights into our long-term historical and cultural relationship with the bee, the role of bees in the Earth's ecosystem, and the complexities of their behaviour, their evolution, and their ways of communicating. There are also practical DIY guides, like *The Bee Book* by Fergus Chadwick, Steve Alton, Bill Fitzmaurice, and Judy Earl (2016), on how to create bee-friendly spaces in your garden and even make medicines and cosmetics from the honey and beeswax produced by your bees.

In less than two decades, apiculture has gone from being associated with the rural world to forming part of the urban environmental movement, one which epitomises new levels of eco-consciousness that mark urban

[34] Benjamin, "In Defence."

[35] The British Beekeepers Association, "BBKA History."

communities in Britain and many other European and American cities[36]. The movement includes people from different backgrounds and generations who are not environmental activists *per se* but, acting in accordance with Schwartz's moral norm-activation theory of altruism, want to impact the environment they live in, regarding it as their small contribution to saving the planet. Camilla Goddard, who runs apiculture classes for schools, families, and wildlife centres and keeps hives on the rooftops of private and public buildings around London – for example, on the University of London campus and the roof of a cosmetics company in Covent Garden – encapsulates this kind of worldview: "By keeping just one hive you are immediately introducing 50,000 pollinators into an urban area and that can have a huge impact on the environment. I like the idea of doing something as an unfettered individual when most of the time we can't seem to affect any of the sad things that are happening to the earth."[37]Although some urban apiarists keep hives to harvest honey for private use or commercial purposes, it appears that for most of the new bee stewards, like Goddard, more value is to be found simply in sustaining a bee colony and knowing that they are helping the vulnerable ecosystem of the city.

The upsurge of interest in beekeeping has raised fears about the availability of food for these urban swarms. It is hard to estimate how many hives a city can support, but concern about providing urban bees and other pollinators with a sufficient amount and variety of food has spawned a vibrant movement to re-wild British cities. Thus, rather than placing more hives in the cities, metropolitan residents and city councils are encouraged to manifest their support for the bee-saving campaign and express their ecological self by creating favourable conditions where bees and other insects and living organisms can thrive within the urban space. This is often done with the help of local branches of the British Beekeepers Association, which, like the Manchester and District Beekeepers' Association, organise training courses on how to create bee-friendly gardens and offer advice on pollen- and nectar-rich plant species.[38] The London Beekeepers' Association

[36] Stephan Lorenz and Kerstin Stark, "Saving the Honeybees in Berlin? A Case Study of the Urban Beekeeping Boom," *Environmental Sociology* 1, no. 2 (2015): 116, https:// doi.org/10.1080/23251042.2015.1008383 [access 21.08.2020].

[37] Benjamin, "In Defence."

[38] Manchester and District Beekeepers' Association, "Bees, Pollinators and Plants Training," February 8, 2020, https://www.mdbka.com/bees-pollinators-and-plants-training/ : [access 22.07.2020].

encourages people to remove paving or decking from their gardens and plant bee-friendly trees and flowers[39]. There are also suggestions to leave brownfield sites intact so that nature can rush in. According to one of Birmingham's beekeepers, the first wild plants that appear are those loved by the bee, such as rosebay willowherb, bramble, and buddleia. "Mankind doing nothing is often the best thing for wildlife, and bees," he says.[40]

It would appear that the concern voiced in so many publications for the future of the honeybee has triggered a kind of spin-off effect, whereby ordinary people and municipal authorities display a broader awareness of the complexity of urban ecosystems and become actively involved in protecting local biodiversity, thus embracing an organicist perspective of Nature. This collective commitment to make the urban environment more bee- and nature-friendly has become an important identity marker for all actors involved and is translated into different forms of green activity. In many places, urban meadows are planted in roundabouts, motorway green belts, housing estates, parks, and brownfield sites.[41] The trend appears to be having a virtuous circle effect on a growing number of British cities. Within two years of planting an extensive wildflower meadow around the site of the 2012 London Olympics, sixty similar urban meadows appeared in various British cities.[42] Volunteer groups build bee houses that provide the necessary habitat for bees and other insects. Urban residents are encouraged to stop using pesticides and plant bee-friendly flowers and trees in their home gardens, turning them into "mini nature reserves."[43] City councils looking to add colour to the urban environment through flower plantings are persuaded to replace expensive bedding annuals that yield little nectar or pollen with cheaper, longer-lasting herbaceous perennials that require less watering, weeding, and fertiliser.[44]

Numerous cities have already responded positively to this trend. A case in point is Newcastle, a city that year after year has topped the league table

[39] Alison Benjamin, "Do Urban Bees Have Enough to Eat?," *The Guardian*, August 2, 2011, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/green-living-blog/2011/aug/02/urban-bees [access 02.08.2020].

[40] Wright, "The Rise."

[41] Mark Patterson, "In Defence of Silly Urban Meadows," *Api: Cultural,* December 19, 2018, accessed May 18, 2020, www.apicultural.co.uk/in-defence-of-silly-urban-meadows.

[42] Richard Conniff, "Urban Nature: How to Foster Biodiversity in World's Cities," *Yale Environment 360,* January 6, 2014, https://e360.yale.edu/features/urban_nature_how_to_foster_biodiversity_in_worlds_cities [access 2.08.2020].

[43] Benjamin, "In Defence."

[44] Benjamin, "Do Urban Bees."

of Britain's greenest cities and whose municipal authorities are intent on using their environmental policies to supplant the city's former industrial image with a greener one based on sustainability and environmental awareness as a distinguishing feature of the city and its residents. The City Council made municipal horticultural services bee-friendly by planting pollen-rich plants, "installing bumble-bee boxes and hives, and designating selected allotments as 'bee gardens.'"[45] Moreover, by adopting the Bee Strategy – an urban bee programme in cooperation with scientists from Newcastle University – it undertook to raise residents' awareness about the problem, instruct them about the benefits of bees, and adapt all of the city's 16 parks and council-owned greenspaces to the needs of bees and other pollinators[46]. Creating the conditions in which the UK's 250 wild bee species and honeybees can flourish in the urban environment is also part of a much larger long-term project – the Newcastle & North Tyneside Biodiversity Action Plan. This is a joint venture between the Newcastle City Council and North Tyneside Council that was embarked upon in 2008. Moreover, residents can find information about nectar-rich plants on the Council's website, which will make their gardens more beneficial for bees and other pollinators. This conservation paradigm aims to protect and enhance biodiversity in the region and leave a cultural and environmental legacy for future generations[47]. As early as in 2011, these efforts earned Newcastle the label of "UK's most bee-friendly city."[48]

A sense of civic pride and competitiveness awoken by such informal 'bee-friendly city' or 'green city' competitions has elicited efforts in numerous British cities to increase biodiversity and adopt protective measures towards nature in the urban space. Such initiatives of municipal authorities and local residents have resulted in the adoption of conservation programmes in Leicester, Brighton, Bristol, Leeds, Sheffield, and numerous other cities that rank high on the list of Britain's most environmentally-conscious

[45] Martin Wainwright, "Bees Help Keep Newcastle at Top of Green City Table," *The Guardian*, October 18, 2010, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2010/oct/18/bees-newcastle-green-city-sustainability [access 7.07.2020].

[46] Newcastle City Council, *Bee Strategy*, https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/planning-building-and-development/trees-wildlife-and-green-environment/wildlife-and#bees. McCallum and Benjamin, *Bees in the City* [access 03.09.2020].

[47] Newcastle City Council and North Tyneside Council, *North Tyneside Biodiversity Action Plan*, 2008, my.northtyneside.gov.uk/sites/default/files/web-page-related-files/Biodiversity%20action%20plan_0.pdf [access 07.07.2020].

[48] Benjamin, "In Defence."

cities.[49] In 2014, local government policies supporting pollinators and biodiversity in urban spaces were given more weight by becoming part of the UK government's national environmental agenda. The Department of Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs announced The National Pollinator Strategy: for Bees and Other Pollinators in England programme, in which it committed itself to raising awareness, disseminating advice, and supporting individual and local government initiatives to protect pollinators in the UK's rural land urban environments.[50] Thus, the green-friendly cultural climate developing in many towns and cities was given the stamp of official national policy.

The recent boom in apiculture may be interpreted as a manifestation of more pronounced global trends towards green consumerism and ecocentrism that have been observable since the 1960s. The scale of the movement in British cities appears to indicate that in accordance with the moral norm-activation theory of altruism, concern for the honeybee has been a trigger that compelled many people to engage in the insect's protection and, consequently, take a more active stance towards environmental protection. One may also hypothesise that such campaigns activate people hitherto uninvolved environmentally, sensitise them to various threats to the world's biodiversity, and enable them to discover their ecological self. Engaging in the honeybee protection campaign and becoming a member of the rapidly growing beekeeping community gives these urban residents a sense of doing something worthwhile for the planet. It provides them with a visible sign of belonging to an extensive social network of people who share an ecological worldview and a moral imperative to save the endangered species.

However, one must not rule out other reasons for the rapid increase in membership of the beekeeping movement. Some urbanites perceive bee stewardship as a 'green' project, a virtuous pursuit, or a hip urban trend.[51] Eco-conscious urban dwellers look for locally-produced food to reduce the carbon footprint resulting from transport over long distances. According to Alison Benjamin, for such people, the prospect of keeping bees in their back

[49] Ruth Styles, "Top 10…Greenest UK Cities," *Ecologist,* March 11, 2011, https://theecologist.org/2011/mar/11/top-10-greenest-uk-cities [access 12.05.2021].

[50] Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, *The National Pollinator Strategy: for Bees and Other Pollinators in England*, (2014): 5–7, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/794706/national-pollinator-strategy.pdf [access 17.07.2022].

[51] Moore and Kosut, *Buzz,* 214.

garden or on the rooftop of their apartment building and eating "locally produced raw honey straight out of their hive" is particularly thrilling.[52] Others are looking for a new hobby to share with friends or family. Such was Paula Carvell's primary motivation to take up beekeeping. She was looking for a rewarding leisure activity that she could do together with her young son. To gain experience, she volunteered to be a lunchtime bee steward of the hives that her company, the Swedish merchant bank SEB, installed on the rooftop of their London office building.[53] It is not without significance that starting and maintaining your own small-scale apiary is relatively low cost and, therefore, within the means of most people. "To get everything together costs a couple of hundred quid, which as far as hobbies go is quite cheap. It's best to come along to an association like ours, to pick up second hand equipment and tips," says one of the beekeepers from Black Country Beekeeping.[54] Some novice beekeepers appreciate the possibility of learning a new skill or craft while doing something they enjoy. This was the unexpected effect for John Gale, one of the amateur beekeepers Tessa Burwood interviewed for her article about urban bees in Birmingham. He and his wife Roxy were persuaded by a friend living in the countryside to offer asylum to the bees in their back garden. Since then, the couple have become locally recognised experts on bees, giving talks to schoolchildren, organising workshops, swapping tips with other apiarists, and removing wild beehives from people's gardens. Although it was not their original goal when deciding to install beehives in their garden, the Gales, like many other amateur urban beekeepers, profit from their hobby by selling honey, beeswax, and other produce of their six hives at local garden centres and markets. According to Burwood's interviewees, the honey produced by city bees is praised by customers for its rich flavour, a result of the wide variety of pollens and the lack of pesticides in the urban environment.[55] It appears then that the allure of urban beekeeping stems from numerous factors, and urban beekeepers' initial motivation to set up an apiary varies. However, the net result of their day-to-day tending to the hives is a high degree of ecological awareness and sensitivity to the needs of different living organisms.

[52] Wright, "The Rise."
[53] McCallum and Benjamin, *Bees in the City.*
[54] Burwood, "Urban Beekeeping."
[55] Burwood, "Urban Beekeeping."

One may also conjecture that interest in bees and their welfare has culturally-conditioned emotional undertones that result from the long history of the human-bee relationship and the sense of obligation to 'pay off' our debt to these pollinators for their thousands of years of service. When considering the problem from a different perspective, another conclusion seems likely, namely that being relatively easy and cost-effective, beekeeping appears practicable. This has made it a convenient avenue for metropolitan residents who live far away from major natural ecosystems to reinstate the connection with nature that had been severed by urbanisation and indoor living.

Alison Benjamin, the co-founder of Urban Bees – an organisation that installs and maintains hives in London, runs beekeeping courses, and promotes making British cities more bee-friendly – supports this viewpoint. She believes city-dwellers are suffering from 'nature deficit disorder' – a term coined in 2005 by Richard Louv, initially to describe the condition of children resulting from their alienation from nature. Supported by a body of scientific evidence, the idea was then extended to adults to denote a condition marked by a diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, obesity, and higher rates of emotional and physical illnesses, all of which were attributed to our disconnection from nature. According to Mark L. Winston, the author of *Where I Sit: Essays on Bees, Beekeeping, and Science* (2018) and a vocal advocate of urban apiculture, keeping bees in your back garden is the best way to feel nature's presence in the city and be aware of the change of seasons, otherwise barely noticeable in the concrete urban landscape. As he maintains, "There is a bit of a farmer and country dweller in even the most urbane city resident,"[56] and beekeeping can help uncover this deeply-hidden innate characteristic of our personality. A similar view is expressed by Camilla Goddard, a London beekeeper and bee sanctuary creator, who has discovered that bee stewardship is an excellent antidote to noxious urban life: "Nobody tells you that the best thing about bees is that they show you so many wonderful insights and connect you entirely to the seasons in a cut-off place like London."[57] So, it is possible that apiculture marks a symbolic reunification with nature for contemporary urban beekeeping communities due to its bucolic

[56] Mark L. Winston, *Where I Sit: Essays on Bees, Beekeeping, and Science* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2018), 14.

[57] McCallum and Benjamin, *Bees in the City.*

connotations. As Alison Benjamin explains, "Keeping bees reconnects you with nature – the seasons, the weather, the flower, the trees – which all bees are so dependent on."[58] This is a sentiment wide shared among urban bee stewards. By watching how bees interact with the surrounding world, they learn to understand the complex system of interdependencies between the different constituents of their biophysical environment and live and act in harmony with nature. Acute awareness of the action-response character of relationships between the various components of nature is a marked feature of many apiarists. This concept of 'relational self' is exhibited, for instance, by Roxy Gale, a beekeeper from Birmingham, who declares, "Every action we take affects the world, it is common sense really. A lot of people don't think when they take action, and bees help you become more aware of what we do to our planet."[59]

It is also worth noting that beekeeping is becoming a channel for creating and reinforcing social bonds in cities and providing urban residents, many of whom otherwise live alienated lives, with a sense of belonging to a community. Beekeeping's potential to consolidate urban communities has been explored by Allesia Bolis, who has installed hives in public spaces in several neighbourhoods in London. She has tried to spark interest and involve local communities in bee-related activities by giving talks about bees and organising events like honey tasting and candle making. The response has been variable, but in some areas, for example in St Luke's, Bolis has observed that her beehives have become the focus of the community's life. As she says, "The people here see bees as very much part of their community. They notice their behaviour and are interested in what they are pollinating. They are always telling me they saw the bees on this or that plant."[60] A similar social phenomenon can be observed in many other British cities where urban apiaries bring together people from different walks of life. Such a vibrant bee-loving community has developed in Highbury Park in Birmingham, where beekeepers and local bee enthusiasts meet regularly to exchange tips, undergo training, or simply interact with bees and observe the life of the hive. One regular visitor encapsulates the experience in the following way: "I find it fascinating the way they are organised and how they all work together. They're very intelligent for

[58] Wright, "The Rise."

[59] Burwood, "Urban Beekeeping."

[60] McCallum and Benjamin, *Bees in the City.*

such little creatures. If you come up to the front of the hive, you'll see the little guard bees come out and have a look at you, then they'll try to attack you. More young people need to get involved in beekeeping because it's interesting, and it's good for the environment."[61]

For more than a decade now, British urban beekeeping associations have been instrumental in raising people's awareness about the importance of bees and other pollinators to the Earth's ecosystem. They have also played a significant role in developing eco identity and a sense of belonging to the bee-loving community by organising meetings and events for their members and sympathisers.[62] For example, the North London Beekeepers Association, apart from holding regular apiary meetings for members, organises many social occasions that are open to the public, such as annual honey shows, community days, and fetes offering such attractions as cake and jam competitions, donkey rides, theatre and art shows, arena events, and food stalls.[63] The London Beekeepers Association invites its members to monthly pub socials and Christmas gatherings.[64] By far the biggest bee-related event is the Bees' Needs Week – an annual gathering organised in London in July by the British Beekeepers Association. During this awareness-raising occasion, Carnaby Street – London's world-famous shopping street – is renamed 'Carnabee Street' and given a bee-themed makeover. Visitors can choose from a range of activities, including observing various bee specimens under the microscope, participating in educational games, experiencing the beehive's inner life with the help of Virtual Reality headsets, honey tasting, and many others.[65] Although many face-to-face events were cancelled or transferred online during the Covid-19 lockdown, they still served to encourage constant interaction and create a sense of community among people united by the common hobby and shared identity of being bee stewards. They form a kind of 'community of fate' that may be socially and ethnically diversified but is held together by psychological bonds resulting from a common purpose.

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[61] Burwood, "Urban Beekeeping."

[62] Marion Tanguy, "Can Cities Save Our Bees?," The Guardian, June 23, 2010, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/jun/23/can-cities-save-bees [access 12.07.2021].

[63] "North London Beekeepers," https://www.beekeeping.org.uk/events [access 12.08.2022].

[64] "The London Beekeepers Association," https://www.lbka.org.uk/events.html [access 12.08.2022].

[65] "The British Beekeepers Association," https://www.bbka.org.uk/news/bees-needs-week [access 25.07.2020].

Conclusions

Urban apiculture in Britain is experiencing a boom, but its future is as yet undetermined. Perhaps it will prove to be no more than a transient trend inspired by media publications alarming the public about the dwindling numbers of honeybees and other pollinators. However, the enthusiastic response of ordinary people and different institutional actors such as municipal authorities and the UK Government may indicate that urban beekeeping is a harbinger of more profound transformations already occurring in urban centres. Concern for the future of the bee has galvanised many city councils and local residents to view urban space as part of a broad and complex ecosystem and undertake initiatives to develop a collective eco identity and a sense of pride in living in a 'green' city. Such individual and systemic projects and policies have already been implemented in numerous towns and cities. Community gardening projects, urban meadows, insect hotels, and bee hives providing sanctuary to numerous species are visible signs of the development of a new urban green culture in modern cities. It is a culture inspired by a moral imperative to offset man's environmental exploitation, and promote commitment to pro-ecological conduct and environmental consciousness. In this new approach, the city and its human and non-human residents are increasingly regarded as intrinsic constituents of a large ecosystem of equal importance for its proper functioning.

Urban apiculture offers a variety of benefits both for the actors involved and for the environment. Contrary to popular belief, modern urban beekeeping is not a solitary activity but part of a well-organised network of institutions and individuals offering guidance, support, and opportunities to socialise and forge relationships with other beekeeping enthusiasts. It is facilitated by mobile applications enabling one to locate other registered beekeepers in their neighbourhood and attend regularly-held beekeepers' meetings or social events organised by local beekeeping associations. A sense of belonging to a community is also created and sustained by numerous publications specifically addressed to amateur beekeepers that highlight the historical and cultural significance of the human-bee relationship, and offer guidance, instruction, and practical tips on maintaining hives and making honey and beeswax products. Such undertakings help unite beekeepers and bee sympathisers and enable them to develop a sense of collective green identity resulting from being part of the sizeable apicultural community.

This is a community of people who share common interests, concerns, and values and are united by the goal of protecting the honeybee and other pollinators as their own contribution to saving the planet. Seeing to the needs of the bee colonies encourages their stewards and sympathisers to develop a new understanding of the urban environment they live in, view it as part of a complex ecosystem inhabited by different species bound by a system of interdependencies, and develop a sense of responsibility for the well-being of its constituents. It fosters personal growth and responsible citizenship by raising awareness of local and global ecological issues and promoting a more mindful and less exploitative attitude toward nature.

Beata Kiersnowska

Be(e)ing Involved – Urban Beekeeping as a Vibrant Environmental and Cultural Movement in British Metropolitan Communities

The paper discusses urban beekeeping as one of the manifestations of environmentalism and a vibrant cultural movement which, like elsewhere in Western Europe and America, has developed in British urban communities in the last two decades. The marked rise of individual and institutional interest in bee stewardship in large urban centres is attributed to the alarming media reports about the rapid decline of honeybees caused by Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD), climate change, and pesticide use. The threat has spawned a large-scale information campaign about the importance of these and other pollinators to the ecosystem and resulted in individual and systemic endeavours to protect the bee and increase the number of existing colonies by installing beehives not only in rural areas but also in towns and cities as part of a broader trend to protect biodiversity in the urban environment. It is argued that because of its environmental, historical, and cultural connotations, contemporary beekeeping has the potential to be a significant cultural movement and an essential instrument in forging identity and community. It channels the individual's inherent need to belong to, feel, and be part of a group, and responds to the growing ecological awareness of British urban residents. In large, multicultural, atomistic urban populations, involvement in the apicultural movement helps develop a sense of community of like-minded individuals who share a common value system and environmental consciousness as identity markers.

Keywords: urban, beekeeping, environment, community, movement

Słowa kluczowe: miejski, pszczelarstwo, środowisko, społeczność