


BeeMail

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Send your news to: beemail@bee-craft.com

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Bees for Development grows

BEEKEEPING charity Bees for Development launched their new website www.beesfordevelopment.org at the BBKA Spring Convention at Stoneleigh.

TV presenter and celebrity beekeeper Bill Turnbull was on hand to officially launch the website, which includes a new feature, the African Information Portal, funded by the Wales for Africa Fund of the Welsh Assembly Government as the charity is based in Monmouth. Additional

funding comes from The Rowse Family Trust and the Anglo-American Group Foundation.

Dr Nicola Bradbear, director of Bees for Development, said: "We are excited at this expansion in the range of information we provide free of charge to the developing world. As climate change becomes evident, efforts to improve agricultural sustainability become more important. This new website will help more people in Africa to practise sustainable beekeeping. This helps to alleviate poverty and helps us all, by maintaining stocks of healthy bee populations."

£10m whip-round for 'pollinators'

OFFICIAL funding for research into bees and 'other insect pollinators' got a massive boost this week, taking the £2 million announced by Defra in January to 'up to £10 million'.

A precise figure was not given for the surprise package and Defra is working with a consortium of partners to fund the research.

But the apparently loose remit of the fund has tempered the relief in the beekeeping world which is now calling for the bulk of the money to be directed at honey bee research.

Fears cash bonanza may be spread thin

And while the additional cash was welcomed it has been pointed out that much research has already been lost to cuts over the years.

The new funding comes from Defra, the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), the Wellcome Trust, Scottish Government and the Welsh Assembly.

Environment Secretary Hilary Benn said: "This funding will give some of Britain's world-class researchers the chance to identify the causes of the decline we're seeing in bee numbers, and that will help us to take the right action to help."

British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA) president Tim Lovett welcomed the news, saying: "This represents a victory for the campaign that British beekeepers have undertaken during the past 12 months."

But he warned: "It is vital that these funds are committed to the work that can make a real difference and meet the challenges facing honey bees."

"Our sincere hope is that the majority of these funds will be directed towards practical research into the problems and threats that honey bees face in this country. We very much look forward to working closely with the funding bodies to ensure the correct projects and priorities are identified and supported based closely on our document **Honey Bee Health – Research Concepts**."

The BBKA's stance was echoed by the National Farmers' Union (NFU). Director of policy Martin Haworth said: "The £10 million research initiative must be targeted accurately to identify and solve the real problems facing the key pollinators of crops."

"It is essential that the new funding is not spent, and ultimately wasted, on well intentioned research into pollinating insects that are of relatively little importance in terms of crop pollination."

"The new funding is a positive move and is a direct result of lobbying and the increased awareness of the problems facing honey bees."

"The magnitude of these problems has always been set in the context of the £200 million annual value of UK crop pollination provided by honey bees."

"Considering the accepted importance of honey bees to crop production, a significant proportion of this funding needs to be allocated straight away to tackling honey bee decline."

The funding announcement coincided with the opening of the Laboratory of Apiculture and Social Insects at the University of Sussex (see May's *Bee Craft* for the full story).

The new facility marks a hopeful rise in fortunes for research and is particularly poignant for researcher Norman Carreck, who was one of the victims of funding cuts at the Rothamsted research station.

He told *BeeMail*: "We need to look forward and ensure the funding goes to the right areas."

"While butterflies, moths and beetles can pollinate we need to concentrate on the main pollinators – the bees – and the honey bee is the most widely used and easily managed pollinator in the field."

Beekeeper's killer jailed

A man who shot a beekeeper in the back as he slept was jailed for life last month after being found guilty of murder.

Donald Robert Alcock, 34, also listed as a beekeeper in some reports, denied the 2007 murder of Anthony Ross Knight in Woodford, a rural town in Queensland state, despite admitting to police that he shot the respected beekeeper so he could steal up to A\$50,000 (£17,000) worth of honey. But a jury at Brisbane Supreme Court, Australia took less than a day to convict him and he was sentenced on March 19.

The crime came to light after Alcock, said to be in financial difficulties, was caught in a literal 'honey trap'. He was crushed by a 1400 kg drum of honey as he tried to sell it to a major distributor. Photographs taken by rescue services showed marks on the drum identifying it as Mr Knight's.

Hive thefts

Beekeepers already struggling with declining stocks have recently been hit by thefts.

In **Shropshire** 18 hives were stolen from a strawberry farm near Telford while in **Whitby, Yorkshire**, 12 hives were taken.

Please contact police with any information.

On the box

Digital viewers should tune in to BBC4 on Sunday April 26.

9 pm *Jimmy and the Wild Honey Bee* – Jimmy Doherty (now a patron of **Bees Abroad**) visits the honey hunters of Nepal.
10 pm *Who Killed the Honeybee?* – an investigation into Colony Collapse Disorder.
11 pm *Horizon: Company of Ants and Bees* – a look at social insects.

Soil Association: 'Ban neonicotinoids'

The Soil Association has condemned Hilary Benn's decision not to ban chemicals thought to be a danger to honey bees.

In a letter to the organic farming charity, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs rejected calls to prohibit the use of neonicotinoid pesticides which have already been withdrawn in France, Germany, Italy and Slovenia.

Peter Melchett, Soil Association Policy Director said: "There is now a mounting body of evidence of the damaging effects these insecticides have on the neurological

and immune systems of honey bees.

"Hilary Benn's decision coincides with the opening of the Laboratory of Apiculture and Social Insects at the University of Sussex, and his announcement of £4.3 million of funding to try to save the British honey bee."

"While new funding and new research are welcome, it will not help if the Government ignores existing scientific evidence that has led other countries to ban these chemicals."

The Soil Association has published a **briefing paper** that summarises the evidence of the impacts of neonicotinoids.

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