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Electronic Green Journal

Title

Review: Bee Time: Lessons from the Hive

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2rp2n233>

Journal

Electronic Green Journal, 1(40)

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Publication Date

2017

DOI

10.5070/G314033229

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Review: David Brower: Bee Time: Lessons from the Hive

By Mark L. Winston

Reviewed by Byron Anderson

DeKalb, Illinois, USA

Winston, Mark L. *Bee Time: Lessons from the Hive*. Harvard University Press, 2014; 283 pp. ISBN: 978-0-674-36839-2 US \$24.95 hardcover; 978-0-674-97085-4 US \$18.95 paperback

Bees, rarely considered in our daily lives beyond their pollinating role or capacity to sting, are actually vital to our survival. The author, Professor and Senior Fellow at Simon Fraser University's Centre for Dialogue and Professor in the Department of Biological Sciences, goes so far as to say, "A world without bees would be almost impossible to contemplate and likely one in which we would never have evolved in the first place" (p.7). Bees are "... as sophisticated in their social behavior as we are in ours" (p. 11). With more than twenty thousand known species on every continent except Antarctica, the value of bees to agriculture and natural ecosystems is incalculable. Itinerant honeybees have become an urban trend and are now recognized as integral components of city habitats.

The book concentrates primarily on honeybees, unique in their ability to process large quantities of nectar into the storage form of honey. To survive, each colony requires approximately 130-180 pounds of honey annually. For each pound, tens of thousands of bees fly about 55,000 miles in total and visit more than two million flowers. How honeybees organize their hives, communicate with each other, and efficiently gather the nectar is clearly detailed. The book explores both how bees have long been connected to human spirituality, and how humans feel an intimacy with bees. The chapter on Art and Culture describes bees in fashion, painting, poetry, music and media. Throughout the text are many examples of ways that bees and humans are similar. The author strongly believes that we can learn much about ourselves by observing them.

More recently, honeybees have reached a survival crisis in which large numbers of bees disappear within days or weeks. Labeled "environmental perturbations", a tipping point is reach called "colony collapse disorder." The disorder is due to many interacting factors and affects about one-third of the honeybee colonies annually. Wild bees, while less studied, are disappearing as well. Many growers now rent managed honeybee colonies that are moved in each year and moved out after flowering. The honeybee crisis is described as "the canary in the mine for contemporary agriculture" (p. 97). Success in countering this disorder will happen "only if we move away from our current manage-and-control attitudes toward strategies where we are more aligned with nature as an ally" (p. 227). In addition to colony collapse disorder, there are other problems

affecting both honeybees, for example, heavy insecticide use, and honey, for example, adulteration with corn syrup.

Bee Time should appeal to apiary researchers, beekeepers, and general audiences. The survival of bees has generated a renewed interest in the subject which has been accompanied by other recently published titles, including *Buzz: Urban Beekeeping and the Power of the Bee* (2013) and *Honeybees: Biology, Behavior, and Benefits* (2016). *Bee Time* has won several awards, including the Governor General's Literary Award for Non-Fiction from the Canada Council for the Arts. Highly recommended for private, public and academic libraries.

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Electronic Green Journal, Issue 40, Winter 2017, ISSN: 1076-7975