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Review: Buzz: Urban Beekeeping and the Power of the Bee

By Lisa Jean Moore and Mary Kosut

Reviewed by Byron Anderson

DeKalb, Illinois, USA

Moore, Lisa Jean and Mary Kosut. *Buzz: Urban Beekeeping and the Power of the Bee*. New York City, NY: New York University Press, 2013. x, 241 pp. ISBN: 9780814763063, cloth, US\$67.50 cloth; 9781479827381, paper, US\$24.00. Acid-free paper; also available as an eBook.

Buzz is a sociological study of the urban bee culture primarily covering Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Bronx in New York. Based on three years of research by the authors, the book covers a vast area, including bee products, culture, and social aspects, as well as the effect of human beings. The focus is on honeybees, one type of approximately 20,000 bee species. Honeybees are described as “multifaceted creatures with flexibility for agricultural, medicinal, corporate, artistic, and wartime purposes” (p. 204). Bees are admired and have long been anthropomorphized, for example, incorporating terms into the vernacular, such as, “busy as a bee” or “worker bee.” More recently, in urban areas, like New York, San Francisco, and others, there has evolved a culture of deeply committed beekeepers. Beekeeper culture overlaps with other interests, such as veganism, locavore food movements, and green consumerism. The text examines at some depth what happens when bees and humans come in close contact with each other, including well-developed analyses of the bee sting, labeled as a “significant species exchange” (p. 115). Segments about the lives of beekeepers add significantly to the study, especially the stories of attachment between bees and humans that transformed the lives of beekeepers.

Human beings “do not rely on any other insect as much as the bee” (p. 29). Honeybee colonies are considered prototypes of sustainability. They create all they need from their environment. Honeybees are the only insects to provide a food product for human consumption. Bees pollinate more than 70 percent of the 100 crop species that supply 90 percent of the world’s food. The annual value of honeybee pollination to U. S. agriculture is estimated at more than \$15 billion. Yet with all that bees do, we take them for granted. Since 2006, however, the honeybee has become newsworthy and is getting attention because of an unexpected loss of many bee colonies. This sudden demise of the honeybee, called “Colony Collapse Disorder,” is a syndrome with no current cure. Colony collapse is not the only concern, however, and other problems exist. Both naturalists and scientists agree that humans are a primary problem for bees in general, for example, their habitats are destroyed by human construction and climate change.

Manipulation through selective breeding, antibiotic treatment, and more has changed the species for the convenience of human consumers. Bees' lives are not improved in any way by their participation in human practices. There is, however, a new movement, called "backwards beekeeping" that employs noninvasive and natural approaches to beekeeping.

Recent books about bees are mostly in the realm of how-to guides of beekeeping. *Buzz*, however, is an exploration in areas, such as, the effect of human beings on bees and the social aspects of bees. It should add significantly to the body of literature on human and animal relationships. Lisa Jean Moore is a feminist medical sociologist and Professor of Sociology and Gender Studies and Mary Kosut is a cultural sociologist and Associate Professor of Media, Society, and the Arts at the Purchase College, State University of New York. The authors have never kept bees, but the end product of the book proves that their laborious undertaking was well worth the effort. *Buzz* will likely appeal to lay readers, beekeepers, and apiarian researchers. This title is highly recommended for general and specialized library collections.

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