



Queen of the Sun: What are the Bees Telling Us? Discussion Guide

Director: Taggart Siegel
Year: 2010
Time: 83 min

You might know this director from:
The Real Dirt on Farmer John (2005)

FILM SUMMARY

QUEEN OF THE SUN: WHAT ARE THE BEES TELLING US? expands our understanding of the busy bees, whose work accounts for an enormous portion of what hits our plates. From the dawn of beekeeping in ancient Egypt, we return to the honeyed afternoons of our childhoods and begin to realize how profound all of this buzzing is.

In 2007, without knowing much about honeybees at all, filmmaker Taggart Siegel read an article on Colony Collapse Disorder. A quote by Albert Einstein was included. "If the bee disappeared off the surface of the globe, then man would have only four years of life left. No more bees, no more pollination, no more plants, no more animals, no more man." This impelled him to pick up his camera and travel across the globe, interviewing beekeepers, scientists, experts, authors, and philosophers in order to present a consensus of the modern world, where industrial farming actively annihilates the creatures that enable our existence.

QUEEN OF THE SUN offers both spirituality and science, intuition and cold hard facts. There is a wide range of global footage and information on Colony Collapse Disorder and why contemporary honeybees are in an alarmingly dire state. Moreover, the film highlights the beauty of these capable creatures and features the people who are fighting for its continued survival.

FILM THEMES

There are no self-motivating factors in a beehive. Bees come together for the greater good. Humans, on the other hand, search for financial gains and quick fixes, thereby toying with the balance of nature, threatening the honeybees and the well-being of all.

BEE CRISIS = HUMAN CRISIS

Trying to separate honeybees from humans is futile. 80% of worldwide pollination rests on the wings of bees. They pollinate nuts, fruits, and vegetables – some of the healthiest foods around. The connection between their health and ours is undeniable. Unless we are prepared to accept an unbalanced, restrictive, and less diverse diet, we must start protecting the ones who feed us now. The simple magic that takes place within a hive has not only provided us with nutrition, a natural sweetener, and a cast of colorful plants and flowers, but it also balances the core of our entire ecosystem.

THE GRIM REAPER AS FARMER

Initially developed in wartime, the pesticides widely used in today's conventional farming practices wreak the same revenge on insects as nerve gas does on the human body. Not to mention the manipulative act of monoculture, eradicating diversity and the intuitive acts of nature. Genetic modification, pumping foreign factors into the food that sustains us, fills our bodies and our honeybees with bacteria we cannot process. Since commercial value has become prioritized over the natural, we are witnessing the wide-reaching, long-lasting implications of this death dance. Pesticides are poisons, and poisons do not sustain life.

THE LESSONS OF THE HIVE

The economy of a beehive is built on sharing. With 60,000 bees working together as a single entity, the power of community becomes very clear within a hive. Biologically dependent on one another, each bee has a strong sense of purpose, of contributing to the greater good. This super-organism works as a unit to fertilize and nourish flowers and crops, with honey as its sweet overflow. It has much to teach the capitalist constructors of our society, where an individual is king and money rules. By disconnecting ourselves from the interconnectedness of life, ignoring our reliance on and role in the course of nature, we all lose in the end.

TRADITIONAL VS. MODERN BEEKEEPER

In ancient societies, the bee was sacred and beekeepers were revered. Honey was used both as medicine and sweetener. Some tribes believed that changes in bees forecasted what was in store for humans. Domestic beekeeping evolved out of a desire to have honey readily available. The modern bee is no longer a sacred entity, but one that is treated as a pest, a nuisance, a threat. Nowadays, commercial beekeeping is powered by finances, and the modern grassroots beekeepers, who work for the bee over the buck, are essential in keeping the honeybee buzzing.

“I am grateful for a crisis, which will give us the possibility to learn something if we are willing, if the heart opens up enough to tell the mind something.”

Gunther Hauk

“If we don't protect (bees), we're not protecting ourselves.”

Ian Davies

FILM FACTS:

- **QUEEN OF THE SUN: WHAT ARE THE BEES TELLING US?** won the Grand Jury Prize at the Red Rock Film Festival and an Honorable Mention from the International Documentary Association.
- A honeybee colony contains three members: a queen, drones, and worker bees. The queen is the mother of all the bees in the colony and is the only fertile female in the hive. Drones are male bees, and their sole purpose is to mate with a virgin queen. Only one in every thousand drones eventually does mate with a queen. Worker bees are infertile females performing all the colony tasks: food preparation, guarding the hive, feeding the queen and drones, as well as controlling hive temperature and climate.
- When a queen is five to six days old, she is ready to mate, at which point she releases a scent to attract drones. She then takes to the air, and drones from miles around smell her scent and embark on the mating chase, which is performed mid-air. Once impregnated a queen can lay up to 2,000 eggs a day, more than her own weight.
- A summer worker bee lives for six to eight weeks, with the most common cause of death being worn-out wings, as workers flap their wings as many as 11,000 times per second.
- As mating occurs mid-flight, drones require excellent vision, explaining their eyes being twice the size of worker and queen eyes. Around 200 drones inhabit a colony during high summer.
- Synthetic chemistry rapidly advanced during WWII, when a range of new pesticides were developed. In 1937, German chemists created the first organophosphate compounds, which are currently used in 70% of U.S. pesticides. These very potent compounds were kept secret during WWII, originally developed as potential chemical warfare agents. After the war, they were repurposed as insecticides.
- Raw honey contains numerous health benefits and is used to heal wounds and burns, treat allergies, fight infections, and cure sore throats.
- The term Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) was first used in 2006 by a Pennsylvania beekeeper overwintering in Florida. More reports soon flooded in. Large commercial migratory beekeepers reported heavy losses of healthy bees, from 30 to 90% of their colonies. During the winter of 2006-07, an estimated 2.4 million honeybee hives were lost in the U.S. alone.
- The earliest recorded bee finding – encased in amber – was found in Burma and is reported to be 100 million years old. Reports speculate that the bee originated in the Far East.
- The first records of domesticated bees come from ancient Egypt. An illustration on a temple wall dating back to 2422 BC shows smoke being blown into hives to remove honeycomb. Because there was no sugar in prehistoric times, honey was highly valued for its sweetness.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Avoid using synthetic pesticides on your plants, both indoor and outdoors. Whenever possible, purchase organic food, cleaning products, and textiles.
2. Join Slow Food International, a global organization linking the pleasure of good food with a commitment to local communities and the environment. They pay special attention to the essential role of bees.
3. Protect bee swarms. If you see one, call your local authority or a professional beekeeper.
4. The Pollinator Partnership sponsors Pollinator Week, a global initiative to raise honeybee awareness.