Bee Life

Activity Report 2015

Beekeepers Protecting Bees and their Environment

BEE LIFE
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European Beekeeping Coordination

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I. Message from the President

FRANCESCO PANELLA
President of Bee Life

What Does the Little Bee tell us?
She says: "Stop the arrogance of a 'science' which appears to be lost in a labyrinth of its own making"

We live in a dark and confused period. The more we research, the more we discover; the more we focus on the complexity of the molecule . . . the more we lose sight of 'the big picture' outside; we lose the global Vision.
Floundering beneath mountains of Scientific Papers, we 'cannot see the wood for the trees'

The devastating impact of: globalised industry, rampant consumerism and industrial, chemically based farming, has wrecked the natural world, changing even the seasons and climate.

We are too complacent and largely unaware of the effects of our actions. Our impact on the natural environment increases exponentially. Food production and farming are not even regarded as part of the natural environment any more. Farming has become just another industrial process; an outdoor factory that must be 'protected' from, nature and living creatures at all costs. In order to maintain this 'defence', farming has declared war on Nature, unleashing an arsenal of ever-more-deadly chemicals.

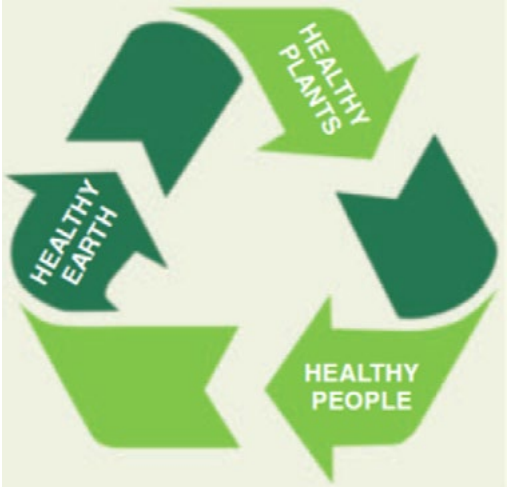
Agronomists only see 'the bottom line' and give little thought to the impact of their chemical warfare on wildlife and landscape; even though the natural world is the very foundation of our food system. Year upon year, we pour billions of taxpayers' Euros, into farm-subsidies.
But what is the outcome of this vast expenditure? We see the massive destruction of wildlife and biodiversity; the erosion of traditional farming and its skills; the decay of cultural heritage; the disappearance of jobs, and a countryside emptied of its people.

At the same time we are appalled by increasing water pollution and toxic contamination of the land with persistent pesticides and chemical fertilisers. Why is all this happening? Because the 'experts' tell us these chemical 'ingredients' are essential to soil fertility and farm profits.

Our politicians and policy-makers pay token lip-service to 'agricultural sustainability', while perversely refusing to do anything that would actually resurrect 'sustainable farming'. If we take just one vital resource - Water: the very source of life; if we consider the terrible effects that chemical pollution has on our water system, what do we find? We see the widespread pollution of our waters by modern farming and the entire myth of 'sustainable intensive agriculture' collapses like a House of Cards!

Our bees are remarkably sensitive and accurate indicators of environmental quality; as they die in their billions, the bees send us a klaxon warning: that something is terribly, terribly wrong in our farming environment.

Hundreds of scientific studies have exposed pesticides as the primary cause of global bee deaths. More and more research studies link the parallel decline of many other living organisms: invertebrates, farmland birds, amphibians, etc., to the very same pesticides which have killed our bees: - neonicotinoids.



The false colours of this supposed “agricultural revolution” have soon faded, from green to deepest black; the colour of mourning. Our responsibility as field workers is to demand that what is really happening should be taken into account, by all those locked away in their ivory research towers. As they increasingly focus on ever more minute fragments of the abstracted world, they lose sight of the real world outside. Yet, this real world, beyond the laboratory windows, shows us the massive destruction of ecosystems by industrial agriculture, every day. This truth, that we experience directly, every day, in the fields and among our bees, transcends the tortuous research of those imprisoned in their laboratories. Like Medieval philosophers, they argue about how many angels can dance on the head of a molecular pin; while outside, in the fields, we are confronted by the deaths of millions of bee colonies, poisoned by modern pesticides. Truly, modern science has only led us to: ‘Paralysis by Analysis’.

Hopefully, a more holistic scientific vision is gaining ground, raising awareness by shining a light into the dark corners of industry-funded science. Much of this progress is due to the energetic work of Bee Life, which reveals the true causal links between the industrial methods of chemical farming and its deadly impact on bees and pollinators.
Through Bee Life’s work, we are finally ready to demand that:

1) Pesticide Risk Assessments must be validated for bees, bumble bees and wasps, as recommended by EFSA Guidelines; such reformed pesticide safety tests must be made standard and compulsory. This must take precedence over any new authorisations for spreading thousands of tons of ever-more-toxic poisons across our land.

2) The ever-present voices of powerful pesticide lobbyists and their fake “studies” should only be given the attention they rightfully deserve; that is to say no attention at all.!

We would take a giant step forward, if we could acknowledge the limits of our scientific knowledge and try to bring about a better farming system with greater humility; and we must take great care to monitor the effects of any actions we allow.

A sustainable farming system is indeed possible; but first we must admit the overwhelming need for such a system, and then we must be prepared to fight for it.

That is why we must support the work of Bee Life, as a fountain of new ideas and practical solutions. Thus technical insights from European beekeepers, channelled through Bee Life, can have positive impacts, far beyond the survival of bees and the world of apiculture…

II. Bee Life 2015 - Key Issues

Campaign for a Total Ban on Neonicotinoids and Fipronil

Beekeepers have suffered and endured the deadly impact of these systemic insecticides on their bees for over 20 years; in 2015 many scientific studies have yet again confirmed the threat these pesticides pose to Europe's biodiversity. In spite of restrictions on some uses of neonicotinoids, the risk for bees and pollinators has not disappeared. Throughout 2015, we urged European agencies and farmers to work towards a "neonicotinoid-free Europe" and for a farming environment free from the toxic effects of fipronil. Bee Life took the Commission to court over its authorisation of a new neonicotinoid insecticide, Sulfoxaflor; Bee Life also turned the spotlight on the authorisation of yet another deadly systemic insecticide, Flupyradifurone.

Stop the marketing of pesticides which are toxic to bees and the ecosystem

Pesticide Risk Assessment (RA) is the key regulatory tool, which alone can prevent the release of bee-harming pesticides, onto the market. For many years, the RA Methodology used by European regulators was framed, manipulated and controlled by pesticide industry lobbyists. Despite a review being carried out in 2013, the recommended reforms have still not been implemented, since they remain blocked by some Member States. This regulatory log-jam continued throughout 2015 and the Commission has not been brave enough to impose the reforms via its executive prerogative. Meanwhile, supra-national bodies, such as the OECD, have launched an improved standard procedure for pesticide risk assessment methods. Our experts helped with this work and published a report on the RA of Pesticides for Bees, covering: the history, stakeholders and future developments of this process. Our experts also provided a detailed commentary to the responsible European authorities on pesticides currently under assessment.

A network effort to promote farming that can serve wildlife, bees and pollinators

If Europe is to restore the health and wellbeing of bees and pollinators, we must achieve fundamental reform of farming and food production. Bee Life continues to work on this crucial issue: in 2015 it promoted a dossier highlighting the biological needs of bees in rural areas, set against the context of the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Bee Life works with a diverse network of NGOs, on matters of mutual concern over: how our food is produced and how the system should be reformed. Our objective remains: to maximise dialogue between stakeholders and to win practical improvements for bees and pollinators throughout Europe.

New Breeding Techniques (NBTs)

The rapid advance of genetic modification techniques (GM) has made it easier to alter the genetic structure and metabolic pathways of living organisms, at ever deeper and more complex levels. Bee Life is part of a network which aims to raise awareness over GM organisms, and the inherent risks which they pose for human health and the environment. Moreover we aim to educate people about the threat which GM organisms bring to the survival of: traditional farming systems, their human communities and regional cultures.

Climate Change and Bees

The movement, and slogan: "Let's not eat our planet! Fight Climate Change", was launched as a call for action to the representatives of countries and global institutions, reunited in Paris during the COP21. Bees and pollinators are very sensitive to changes in the environment and weather conditions and thus climate change has a genuine impact

Raising awareness about honeybees: their lifestyle and role for nature and humanity

Bee Life brings together: farmers, beekeepers, European institutions and beekeeping associations; in this role we contribute to many public consultations, conferences and events. We aim to inform the public about the crucial role which bees serve in our food system, and to explain the difficulties which beekeepers face in the field. We also try to educate and inform people about what bees need for their health and wellbeing; we seek radical solutions to the long-term problem of bee-deaths, aiming to prevent the loss of millions of bee colonies in the future.

Transparency and Environmental Accountability vs. Economic Power and Conflicts of Interest

Bee Life tries to educate and inform the public and the relevant authorities, on the propaganda strategies and political tactics which the pesticide companies use, in order to keep their bee-killing pesticides on the market. We support various campaigns on this subject, such as the STOP TTIP campaign.

III. Vision, Mission and Expertise

PROTECT BEES IN ORDER TO SAFEGUARD OUR FOOD AND HEALTH

Bee Life European Beekeeping Coordination ASBL (Bee Life) is an association composed of various national beekeeping associations and farmers. Bee Life currently has 15 members drawn from six Member States: Belgium, France, Austria, Italy, Luxembourg and Spain.

Our members have worked together since 2009, through the informal working group CoEur (European Beekeeping Coordination). Since 2013, Bee Life European Beekeeping Coordination ASBL, was officially created from this beekeeping partnership.

Our Mission is: to improve environmental quality for honeybees and wild pollinators.

Our actions are motivated by a shocking insight, namely: that the agricultural landscape of Europe is no longer healthy, or safe, for bees and pollinators; indeed the current farming environment poses a growing threat to beekeepers and beekeeping. The 'normalisation' of pesticides, which are highly toxic to bees, is almost universal in the landscape; and as a result, bees are dying all the time. Even the colonies which apparently survive, are seriously weakened and fail to thrive, or develop normally. We are sending bees and pollinators out into a farming landscape which is profoundly toxic: from soil and water to the poisoned flowers of treated crops, - pesticides are deadly, highly persistent and ubiquitous.

BEES, FOUNDATION OF BIODIVERSITY AND GUARDIANS OF HUMAN HEALTH

Bee Life's Vision is centred upon four principles:

1. Insect pollinators, especially bees, are the supporting pillars of our ecosystem and biodiversity. Bees provide food security, biological diversity and environmental richness, via their pollination of vital food crops, fruits and vegetables, trees and wild flowers.

The honey bee, thermometer of our health and environment

The health and wellbeing of insect pollinators rests directly upon the quality of the environment. Bees are "environmental sentinels" and because of their size and biology they are highly sensitive to any toxic elements in the landscape. A clean and healthy environment is absolutely essential for the welfare and survival of bees.

3. Honeybees are excellent bio-indicators thanks to their ubiquity. They accurately monitor and reflect the environmental quality of their environment: from the landscape scale, down to molecular level. They enable us to monitor and measure a wide range of environmental indicators and to collect information which helps us plan and implement environmental management.
4. Finally, of all pollinating insects, the honeybee is the best-known and most-studied species in terms of biology, ecology, pathology and toxicology. Bees are also the most "monitored and observed" pollinators, thanks to the work of beekeepers and due to the economic value of their honey and hive products. Moreover, honeybees share many of the same habitats and biological traits with other wild pollinators.


A working honey bee

RETURNING BEES BACK TO THE HEART OF OUR FARMING SYSTEM

In response to the decline of bees and pollinators, Bee Life's key Mission is to identify environmental threats which affect them and to propose practical solutions. Bee Life pays particular attention to environmental threats which arise from changes in farming practice. Over the last 20 years, field

experience has confirmed that farming areas pose the highest risk for pollinators. Bee Life aims to foster a much more pollinator-friendly farming environment for all of Europe.

BEE LIFE, A DIALOGUE BETWEEN BEEKEEPERS, SCIENTISTS AND EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS

Bee Life serves as an essential link between beekeepers, scientists and decision makers.

As co-ordinators, we gather, monitor and analyse a wide range of information relating to bees and their environment. This work happens on three-levels:

- We gather field information from members who identify problems in their region
- We monitor new scientific publications, political decisions and relevant European legislation; thus, when specific problems are identified, we contact the European authorities and report our observations and conclusions.
- Finally we disseminate technical and educational information, to raise awareness among the wider public, through various channels.

Bee Life aims to ensure the implementation of protection policies for the environment and health of pollinators. This work is equally supported by: practical field experience and the direct observations of beekeepers, as well as peer-reviewed, independent scientific evidence.

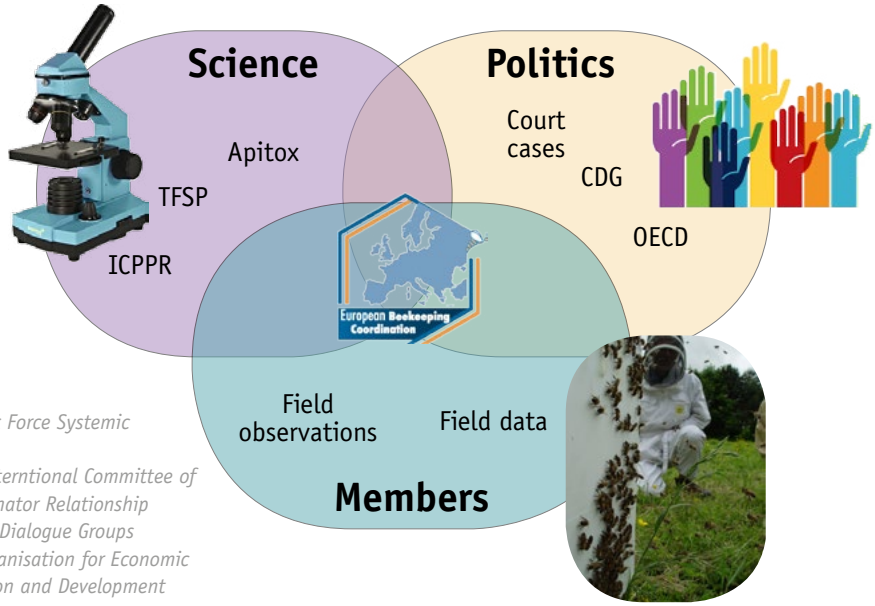
A CENTRE OF TECHNICAL EXPERTISE SINCE 2009

As mentioned above, Bee Life was formally created in 2013; however, its Members have actually worked together since 2009. Since then, Bee Life has played a key role in improving the legal framework for pesticide authorisation, through the directive (EC) 91/414 and the regulation (EC) 1107/2009 and their implementation. Bee Life also proposed technical improvements to the Pesticide Risk Assessment system, in relation to bees, and informed European authorities about the many regulatory gaps in this dossier.

Apiary in a cherry orchard

Similarly, Bee Life reported on the alarming lack of transparency in the framing of the Risk Assessment Methodology, and its overt manipulation by pesticide industry representatives. Later, in 2013, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) published new guidelines and proposed new methodologies for Pesticide Risk Assessment. However, much work remains to be done if these proposals are to be successfully implemented.

Finally, Bee Life has played a key role, of informing European institutions on the extreme risks which neonicotinoid insecticides and fipronil pose for: bees, pollinators and ecosystems. Bee Life continues to work on the wider issue of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and towards the development of a more ecologically-sensitive farming system, tailored more to the needs of bees, pollinators and wildlife.



TFSP - Task Force Systemic Pesticides
ICPPR - Interntional Committee of Plant Pollinator Relationship
CDG - Civil Dialogue Groups
OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

IV. Bee Life : a Family of Organisations Working Together

Members of Bee Life reunited at the General Assembly

The General Assembly of Bee Life was held on the 25th of February 2015 in Paris, at the premises of the Syndicat National d'Apiculture (SNA). Bee Life had the pleasure to welcome two new members: *Bee Generation* and *Agrupacion de Defensa Sanitaria de Apicultores andaluces*, respectively Italian and Spanish associations. *Bee Generation* actively campaigns to raise public awareness on the importance of pollinators and on the issues linked to bee protection. *Bee Generation* is also conducting a big fundraising campaign. Most of the funds collected will enable Bee Life to continue its work at a European level. The *Agrupacion de Defensa Sanitaria de Apicultores andaluces* offers technical services to beekeepers in Andalusia, sharing the same values as Bee Life and supporting our goal of creating a better environment for bees.

Bee Life's main concerns are centred on the need to:

- Monitor the toxic impact of neonicotinoids and fipronil on bees and pollinators,
- Implement EFSA's guidelines for improved Risk Assessment of Pesticides on pollinators
- Monitor and confront issues raised by systemic pesticides in general.

Another priority is work relating to the Common Agricultural Policy.

Bee Life proposes to include: "*Indicators of Environmental Quality*", such as the environmental quality of pollen or water, in order to monitor and assess the effects of political measures, aimed at reducing pollinator decline and enhancing biodiversity on farmland.
However, at the present time, the financial sustainability of the organisation remains the biggest problem for Bee Life.

The assembly in Paris on the 25th of February 2015 gave us the opportunity to meet with the *European Professional Beekeeping Association* (EPBA) in order to gain an overview and insight into the work of both associations and to present the work of each.

Members of Bee Life

V. Activities of Bee Life

V. 1. PESTICIDES AND BEES

NEONICOTINOIDS AND FIPRONIL: SCIENTIFIC AND POLITICAL MONITORING

On the political side

Several national initiatives are emerging, which would go beyond the Commission's decision to partially suspend three neonicotinoids. Thus, political initiatives were launched in France[1] and in Wallonia (Belgium)[2], for a total ban of these insecticides. However, some Member States, like the United Kingdom, have granted exemptions for the use of some neonicotinoids (on 5% of rapeseed crops) which remain suspended in other parts of Europe. This was done, despite political pressure from UK citizens and the evident good yield of rapeseed crops untreated with neonicotinoids. European beekeepers asked farmers' organisations and governments to stop lobbying the EU to rescind the current partial ban on the use of neonicotinoids. These neurotoxic compounds continue to kill bees and block the adoption of integrated pest management[3] strategies.

In Romania, despite beekeepers' protests, the government granted repeated exemptions, so there was no real interruption in the widespread use of neonicotinoids in that country.

Photo : C. Wurm

Coated wheat seeds that can be seen in fields in Belgium and in Austria. These examples show that coated seeds are not always buried, inducing risks for wild fauna.

The effects in Romania were disastrous: in summer 2015 an increasing number of acute bee-poisoning incidents were documented during the sunflower bloom; this was evidenced by the large number of dead bees found at hive entrances. Beekeepers made several videos[4] showing piles of dead bees carpeting the fields. According to the Romanian Beekeepers' Association, at least 10% of beekeepers suffered high losses in July and August 2015 and tens-of-thousands of colonies died. It is tragic to see beekeepers from Eastern Europe suffering the same disasters that their French, Belgian, German and Italian colleagues endured in the 1990s and 2000s.

In Germany, Bayer lost a court case to the association Friends of the Earth (BUND), over the impacts of Thiacloprid on bees; another neonicotinoid which remains on the market[5].
However, in Germany, the government has maintained the ban on all imports of neonicotinoid-coated seeds for winter cereals, and has continued the ban on the use of neonicotinoids for cereals since 2008/2009[6], due to their harmful effects on pollinators.
Such protective policies would have a dramatic impact if they were followed by all the member states of the European Union. EFSA is currently assessing whether Germany's policy could be adopted by all Member States. If this were done, we could see a Europe-wide ban on the planting of neonicotinoid coated seeds for all winter cereals; however this could not come into effect before spring 2017.

On the legal side

2015 saw the advent of a new pesticide harmful to bees; Sulfoxaflor, produced by Dow AgroChemicals. This new systemic insecticide was authorised by the EU, despite shortcomings in the authorisation dossier[7]. Indeed the very same dossier-gaps were one of the reasons why neonicotinoids were suspended, for some uses in Europe[8]. Sulfoxaflor has

Photo : L. Bourdouxhe

1. http://www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2015/03/19/abeilles-l-assemblee-vote-l-interdiction-des-insecticides-neonicotinoides-en-2016_4597273_3244.html

2. http://diantonio.wallonie.be/carlo-di-antonio-veut-interdire-l-utilisation-des-pesticides-aux-n-onicotinodes

3. http://bee-life.eu/en/article/89/

4. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1K0kziy60y4

5. http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/press_releases/chemical-giant-bayer-loses-libel-action-overpesticide-harm-claims_12032015

6. http://www.theecologist.org/News/news_round_up/2959892/bee_cause_germany_tightens_uk_relaxes_neonic_regulation.html

7. http://bee-life.eu/medias/letter/07052013-annex-i-comments-on-the-draft-assessment-report-of-sulfoxaflor.pdf

8. http://bee-life.eu/medias/letter/07052013-annex-i-comments-on-the-draft-assessment-report-of-sulfoxaflor.pdf

an almost identical mode of action to neonicotinoids and is just as deadly to bees. Following this authorisation, Bee Life, in partnership with PAN-Europe and the Italian association UNAAPI, took the Commission to court over its authorisation of Sulfoxaflor[9]. At the same time, several actions[10] were organised, both in the European Parliament, by Mrs Sylvie Goddyn and by the public. Bee Life sent an official letter to the Bulgarian Minister of Agriculture, requesting not to authorise any pesticides based on Sulfoxaflor, because of the high risks it poses for pollinators and in particular bees.

In October, the European Commission and Member States authorised Flupyradifurone, yet another new neonicotinoid-like insecticide, produced by Bayer CropScience. Yet again, this highly toxic substance did not undergo a proper Risk Assessment, (in terms of its chronic toxicity and sub-lethal effects on wild, or managed, bees), because authorisation was granted only for 'minor uses'; this regulatory loophole exists because 'minor uses' only require a lower data standard. As was done in July for Sulfoxaflor, DG Sante simply ignored the risks which this systemic and persistent insecticide poses for pollinators[11].

The court case against Bayer and Syngenta follows its course. It was delayed due to Bayer's reluctance to provide some data to the court.

On the scientific side

Concurrently, EFSA published a new report, on August, 26th 2015, which confirmed the risks neonicotinoids pose for bees, when they are not applied as coated seeds or soil treatment. Following the publication of this new report and the authorisation of Sulfoxaflor, Bee Life took issue with the Commission over the irregular procedures which had been used to grant market authorisation for several systemic pesticides: Sulfoxaflor, Cyantraniliprole, Chlorantraniliprole. These three insecticides were authorised during the transition period between the new legislation on pesticides (Regulation 1108/2009) and the older regulation (Directive 91/414/EEC).

More and more studies are published which confirm the risks neonicotinoids pose for bees.

In 2015, two Meta-Analyses assessed the wider impact of neonicotinoids on global biodiversity and ecosystems. One of these, the *Worldwide Integrated Assessment on Systemic Pesticides*[12], was published by an independent group of international scientists; this comprised 8 scientific articles and more than 1,000 references. Bee Life took part in the work of this group, through the support of one the scientists specialising in pollinators. This report's conclusions are devastating: it is not just bees which are poisoned by these systemic insecticides; a wide range of pollinators, insects, birds, aquatic organisms and entire ecosystems are similarly affected by these biocides. The report concludes that only a drastic reduction of the use of systemic pesticides can improve the global situation. The second study, carried out by the EASAC (*European Academics Science Advisory Council*) confirmed the results and conclusions of the first one[13].

A new study[14], from the United Kingdom revealed the negative effects of neonicotinoids in large scale field-conditions, over several years. The study also reveals the illusory economic benefits of neonicotinoids for farmers, when compared to the loss of bee colonies and other pollinators.

Botías et al.[15] published an article on how foraging bees are exposed to neonicotinoids; this revealed that the toxic effects are not limited to the flowers of bee-attractive crops.
On the contrary, neonicotinoids spread through the wider environment, far beyond cultivated areas, and contaminate wild flowers on: field margins, hedgerows and along ditches. This study discovered, that 97% of the neonicotinoid contaminated pollen gathered by bees, came from wild flowers, rather than from crops. Thus wild flowers are the main factor in the exposure of bees to neonicotinoids. These results, explode the myth: that merely planting more wild flowers, could mitigate the exposure of bees to neonicotinoids, during the blooming period of treated crops.

Finally, a Swiss study (Williams et al.[16]) revealed that one queen in three, fails (dies or becomes infertile) following the colony's exposure to neonicotinoids during the queen-rearing period. This

Foraging bees at the entrance of the hive

9. http://bee-life.eu/en/article/94/

10. http://bee-life.eu/en/article/93/

11. http://bee-life.eu/en/article/96/

12. http://www.tfsp.info/assets/WIA_2015.pdf

13. http://www.easac.eu/home/reports-and-statements/detail-view/article/ecosystem-se.html?cHash=37dcdf954214d069d661a6e7020a8bf8&no_cache=1&sword_list%5B0%5D=neonicotinoids

14. http://www.nature.com/articles/srep12574

15. http://pubs.acs.org/doi/abs/10.1021/acs.est.5b03459

16. http://www.nature.com/articles/srep14621

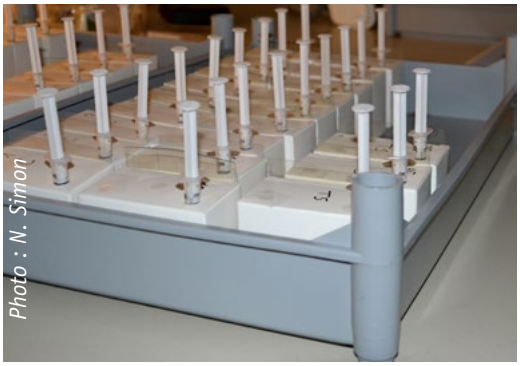
The Task Force on Systemic Pesticides

discovery confirms direct observations from queen breeders in farming areas for the past 12-15 years. EFSA has launched an appeal for data on the observed effects of Imidacloprid, Clothianidin and Thiamethoxam[17] as well as on fipronil[18]. Bee Life mobilised its members to respond to this call for data on neonicotinoids from EFSA; the aim was to send as much field data on observations of the effects of neonicotinoids and environmental exposure as possible.

AUTHORISATION AND MONITORING OF ACTIVE SUBSTANCES HARMFUL TO BEES, THE ENVIRONMENT AND HUMANS

The procedure for market authorisation of a pesticide's active substances, still raises concern, in respect of pollinator protection. In principle, the legislation requires that marketed products must pose no harm for human beings, animals or the environment; but, as always: ***"the devil is in the detail"***. Europe has adopted an authorisation procedure based on "confirmatory data"; that is to say, pesticide authorisations are often 'conditionally' granted, even when important data is missing from the authorisation dossier. More precisely, authorisations have been granted when crucial data has not been provided on: chronic bee-toxicity, bee-larval death rates and abnormal bee behaviour. As a result, Bee Life has challenged the Commission over the legality of this authorisation procedure for: Sulfoxaflor, Chlorantraniliprole and many other active substances that need an authorisation or a re-authorisation (i.e. Cyantraniliprole and Cyclaniliprole). Our contact with MEPs over this issue resulted in parliamentary questions being sent to the Commission.

Experts working with Bee Life took part in public consultations launched by EFSA during the assessment of the active substance Cyclaniliprole, produced by Ishihara Sangyo Kaisha, Ltd.



Cages of bees involved in a laboratory toxicity test.

This new active substance is a ***'diamide insecticide'*** which affects insects' ability to contract muscles and to process nerve signals. Along with several other associations, Bee Life also sent a letter to the Health Commissioner to demand a thorough re-assessment of the carcinogenic capacity of the most-used herbicide in the world: Glyphosate.

PESTICIDE RISK ASSESSMENT FOR BEES AND TOXICOLOGICAL TESTS

Since 2013, the Member States and the Commission failed to agree over the adoption of new guidelines on Pesticide Risk Assessment (RA) for bees. In spite of repeated requests from Bee Life for further action, the blockage remained in 2015. Bee Life publicised this unacceptable situation in its press release: ***"Black spring for bees: national governments blocking appropriate risk assessment of pesticides on bees"***[19].

A document entitled ***"EFSA Guidance: New methodologies to assess the risks of pesticides for bees"***[20] was drafted by Bee Life. It proposed a timeline for the creation of these new guidelines and explains its implementation blockage.

The OECD published a Pesticide RA Methodology, validated and standardised for the testing of acute bee-larval-toxicity. Bee Life took part in a meeting on the 22-24 of April with the working group of the OECD to improve existing and future methodologies for assessment of pesticide-toxicity for bees. As it stands, a validation for chronic larvae toxicity tests is in progress, as well as one for chronic toxicity tests on adult bees of 10 days age. The first test is the most developed and could well be published in 2016. The second still needs some work. During this meeting, France presented its 'ring-test' for the methodology of how bees homing-flights are affected by pesticide exposure. The validation for this methodology began in 2015 and will be subject to validation by the OECD during the next year.

In 2016 there will be another meeting of this group, where we hope to see the:

- Finalised methodology for risk assessment of chronic bee-larval toxicity
- Methodology for the assessment of adult bee chronic-toxicity discussed
- Validation, by the OECD, of the bees' homing-flight-test, launched globally for all laboratories wanting to participate.

Bee Life follows the activity of the task force of COLOSS APITOX.

17. http://www.efsa.europa.eu/fr/press/news/150522.htm

18. http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/press/news/150901?utm_content=news&utm_source=EFSA+Newsletters&utm_campaign=e7466a26b3-HL_20150902&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_7ea646dd1d-e7466a26b3-59474161

19. http://bee-life.eu/fr/article/82/

20. http://bee-life.eu/medias/temp/guidance-en.pdf

V. 2. BEE HEALTH

ADVISORY GROUP ON PLANT AND ANIMAL HEALTH

Bee Health Initiative

Launch of the Bee Health Initiative; this platform aims to improve dialogue between the different stakeholders, concerned with impacts on bee health. This will include firms from the pesticide industry, field workers and associations. From this initiative comes the planned organisation of a conference in 2016 on: ***'Environmental Issues for Pollinators and their Possible Solutions'***, headed by the European Commission.

Bees inside the colony

BIBLIOGRAPHIC SURVEILLANCE

One of the ongoing activities of Bee Life is the monitoring of the scientific, legislative and political literature linked to bee health and possible stress factors.

V. 3. AGRICULTURE AND POLLINATORS

CIVIL DIALOGUE GROUPS

There were several meetings of Civil Dialogue Groups[21] (CDG). Bee Life representatives took turns to participate in these meetings between the DG Agriculture and Rural Development, different agricultural sectors and citizen associations. As a reminder, Bee Life occupies a seat in meetings concerned with: animal products, arable crops, direct payments and greening, environment and climate change, and CAP CDGs.

By taking part, Bee Life explains its point of view, in order to achieve a better integration of pollinators and beekeepers to the Common Agricultural Policy and to agro-ecosystems (e.g. arable crops). Bee Life promotes the principles set out in its brochure ***"Bees and Agriculture"*** and ***"Bees and CAP".*** During these meetings, Bee Life proposes the participation of technical field experts and adds to the agenda issues, such as the progress of Integrated Pest Management systems in Europe, or alternatives to pesticides which harm bees. Bee Life draws attention to the dangers and absurdities of allowing the use of pesticides in 'Ecological Focus Areas'.

However, Bee Life – along with five other NGOs taking part in these meetings – wrote a letter to the General Director, in order to express concern about the poor functioning of these groups. There is low representation of civic society in these groups, which means they are clearly unbalanced, and some CDGs meet far more often than others. This is an abuse of the system and reveals a fundamental lack of transparency.

21. http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/civil-dialogue-groups/arable-crops_en.htm

V. 4. NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND RISKS FOR BEES

The last 5-10 years have seen rapid progress in the techniques of genetic modification. These revolutionary technologies open the door to profound and far-reaching changes to the genetic structure and metabolic pathways of living organisms. This has led to the emergence of two new overlapping fields of genetic engineering Synthetic Biology and the so-called New Breeding Techniques (NBTs).

Bee Life co-signed an open letter to the Commission on these new breeding techniques[22] and closely monitors the development of this dossier, as we can foresee negative impacts on bees and apiculture in the future.

V. 5. CLIMATE CHANGE AND BEES

Climate change affects us all and especially animals that depend as much on their environment as bees. Changes in seasons, in colony development and flora, drought, lengthening of reproduction cycles with an impact on the development of factors of stress for bee health, etc.: the sum of collateral damage still remains to be determined.

During the COP21, different associations, including Bee Life, launched a call to action to the representatives of countries and global institutions that were reunited in Paris with the slogan ***"Let's not eat our planet! Fight Climate Change"***[23] to turn the spotlight on the relationship between food and climate.

Bee foraging on a flower of Tagetes sp.

V. 6. TRANSPARENCY AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Since its creation, Bee Life has monitored events and news, relating to the issues of: transparency, pesticide industry lobbying and 'conflict of interests' among academics, regulators and officials, in relation to bees and pesticides. Such conflicts of interest exist in: the research community, the public service and conferences organised at a national or European level. This issue relates to themes such: as Risk Assessment of Pesticides and GMOs, sustainable agriculture, bee health… It is vital to alert the public and the European authorities on these matters.

In 2015, Bee Life continues its work, in partnership with its European network, to expose conflicts of interests and lack of transparency; we have also participated in discussions about how to improve the independence of scientific expertise in Europe.

22. http://bee-life.eu/en/article/83/

23. http://www.slowfood.com/lets-not-eat-up-our-planet-fight-climate-change/

VI. Events and Interactions with the Institutions

CONFERENCES FOR THE PROTECTION OF POLLINATORS

During the conference for the launch of the European Red List of Bees ***"Fostering bee-friendly agricultural practices"***[24], Bee Life and other stakeholders highlighted many solutions which could improve the environment for bees, ensuring a better place for pollinators in agricultural landscapes[25].

The Slovenian delegation responsible for the European "Honey breakfast" initiative

Concerns over the situation of pollinators reached the Agricultural Committee in the European Parliament[26] and a meeting on the theme ***"Bees, Honey and Apidology"*** was organised. On this occasion, Slovenian beekeepers, the Slovenian ministry of agriculture and Slovenian MEPs launched the European initiative ***Honey breakfast*** and the ***World Day of Bees*** on the 22nd of May, in order to promote: protection of bees, and sustainable consumption of local products. At the same time, an alternative French initiative, proposed the factory-production of honeybee colonies, in protected areas, to replace lost colonies. Bee Life publicly supported the Slovenian initiative and reminded that the use of « Kleenex®» bees to compensate for bee-losses by repopulation, as proposed by some firms, is not a sustainable solution. In order to protect bees, we must, above all else, improve and restore the quality of the environment, which sustains us all.

Furthermore, a platform for wider discussions was launched. This includes several European and national associations, working on agriculture and sustainable food production (Sustainable Food and Farming platform). Bee Life takes part, in order to emphasise the importance of pollinators. Similarly, some sixty MEPs from different political parties created the group "Sustainable Food System" for the purpose of facilitating dialogue between NGOs, researchers and agro-food industries, and of raising the profile of these themes within the European Parliament.
Finally, the work of Bee Life concerning the Pesticide Risk Assessment for bees was presented in Daejon, South Korea for the 44th Apimondia Congress.

Other events to which Bee Life or its collaborators attended were the conference "Good Food – Good Farming"[27] organised by ARC2020 (10.02.2015), the SUPER-B workshop (3.03.2015), the conference "Ecosystem services, agriculture and neonicotinoids: launch of the report of the European Academy of Science Advisory Council" (13.04.2015), the conference "Redefining Integrated Pest Management"[28] organised by Pollinis (01.07.2015).

MEETINGS, OFFICIAL E-MAILS AND PARTICIPATION IN FORUMS

Several meetings with civil servants of the Commission took place in 2015, including one with Mr Ladislav Miko, former Director-General of the DG SANTE and currently Vice-Director General. During the last meeting, attended from Bee Life by its President, Francesco Panella, Bee Life presented to the Commission a proposal to launch a pan-European environmental monitoring study, with the help of beekeepers.

A letter stating the priorities of Bee Life was sent to the new Health Commissioner, M. Vytenis Andriukaitis. In September, another letter was sent to the Commissioner to demand a better implementation of the legislation linked to pesticides, which currently permits the authorisation of pesticides, that pose risks for bees, without a proper risk assessment.

F. Panella at the DG Santé

Bee Life participated to the TECA Forum of the FAO on the theme of bees and pesticides.

24. http://iucn.org/news_homepage/all_news_by_region/news_from_europe/?21271/Launch-of-European-Red-List-of-Bees-Fostering-bee-friendly-agricultural-practices

25. http://bee-life.eu/fr/article/85/

26. http://bee-life.eu/en/article/84/ Video : http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20150409IPR41256/html/Committees-ENVI-AGRI

27. http://www.arc2020.eu/front/2015/02/good-food-good-farming-arc2020-conference/

28. http://ebcd.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Press-release-IPM.pdf

VII. Communication and Publications

www.bee-life.eu

BEE LIFE WEBSITE

The Bee Life website fosters better communication with members and the wider public and helps us organise events for the network. Articles, press releases and ads are available on this platform, as well as information for our members. It is also a secure Intranet for members of Bee Life, on which we share a lot of information in different formats (videos, photos, documents, etc.).

BEE LIFE FLASHNEWS

This publication is sent to Bee Life's members every three month, it conveys the latest news from Europe, from around the world and from EU Member States; it includes an agenda of upcoming events linked to bees, pollinators and apiculture.

BEE LIFE SOCIAL MEDIA

Publications and events are advertised through Facebook. The public who subscribe to our Facebook page are kept informed about Bee Life events, publications, projects, etc.

Bee-Life-European-Beekeeping-Coordination

Bee Life Channel YouTube

VIII. Funding

Bee Life is solely funded by its members, via their financial contributions and funding of specific projects. Bee Life tries to enlarge and diversify its financial support in order to sustain its activities. Bee Life also takes part in conferences and information-days during general assemblies, or steering committees of beekeeping associations (***European Professional Beekeepers Association, Association Española de Apicultores, Deutscher Imkerbund***) and national beekeeping congresses (Greek beekeeping congress). Bee Life and the platform Api-services launched a collaboration in 2015 for the spreading of information and publications.

Bee Life would like to thank the association DBIB (***Deutsche Berufs- und Erwerbsimkerbund***)[29] for its donation and the trust it gave to Bee Life. The Coordination would like to thank as well SWIFT for their donation (*Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication*)[30]. Finally Bee Life thanks the Bee Life campaign led by Bee Generations in Italy. These actions, this support and the motivation from citizens are essential for the continuation of Bee Life's work and for the ever-lasting representation of bees at the European level.

29. *http://www.berufsimker.de/index.php/der-dbib/der-dbib*

30. *https://www.swift.com/about-us/financials*

www.beelife.it

DEUTSCHER BERUFS UND ERWERBS IMKERBUND

SWIFT