



theflower&thebee

In the beginning there was a flower and a bee. Dana Sumar reports.

We are exceedingly blessed to live in a cradle of humanity walking in the steps of our ancient foremother known to scientists as Mrs Ples. While it is not known whether Mrs Ples was able to enjoy her herbal tea with honey, there is no doubt that honey-loving Honeyguide birds cleverly lead the Khoisan to beehives to harvest honey, enabling them to enjoy this rare and singular delicacy, even in those ancient days.

But plants and bees offered more than only enjoyment for our ancestors, who soon learned to use them for curative purposes as well. While herbalism seems to be comfortably well accepted by the West, apitherapy has been forgotten. A revival started only 20 to 30 years ago.

As a philosophy, apitherapy is a form of harmony between the individual and the environment. The importance of bees and their work, both as honey-makers and pollinators, is now widely recognised, as can be seen in some recent international agreements. So, the Agricultural Biodiversity International Initiative for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Pollinators was initiated following the recommendation of the 1998 Sao Paulo Declaration on Pollinators, and the Workshop on the Conservation and the Sustainable Use of Pollinators in Agriculture (with an emphasis on bees).

Propolis, the bees' own antibiotic, is increasingly being seen as a medicine for the 21st century.

According to the San Paulo Declaration on Pollinators: 'A major problem is emerging for the world's agricultural production reflecting the risk involved in relying on single pollinator species (while the numbers of honeybee colonies have decreased dramatically. Documentation suggests that losses are mostly due to the use of agrochemicals, monoculture practices, deforestation, and possibly to the introduction of exotic pollinators. Native pollinators need protection and management to sustain the pollination service that they provide. Agricultural practices must be designed to incorporate the protection and sustainable management of bee populations.'

America has lost 90% of its wild bees and 50% of its kept bees in the last 25 years. Similar signals are coming from UK. It seems certain that the bees are in danger. Bumblebees and honeybees represent the major class of pollinators and it is commonly thought that they indirectly supply a third of our total nutritional requirements. They provide a similarly large proportion of food for animals as a consequence of their tireless pollinating work. Through bees, nature guarantees plant proliferation and plants not only provide food but the clean fresh air we breathe as well.

The harmony between us and the environment is a prerequisite of

our survival. Bees seem to be at the very heart of that understanding. By embracing bees we embrace the hope that our odyssey will not culminate with a shipwreck. So close is our species' survival linked to that of bees that Albert Einstein calculated that mankind will outstay the demise of bees by approximately four years. Should we trust Einstein's maths? I believe we should.

Honey healing

As a medical principle apitherapy is primarily the cultivation of health and its re-establishment when sickness interferes. Prevention of disease is not only about avoidance of illness, it should be more about celebrating health and living in health. I see the products of the beehive celebrating life in a wonderfully active, productive and compelling manner.

Understanding the beehive

It is not difficult for bees to find a shelter in the wild – a hole in the ground, an empty tree trunk, or a crevice on the mountainside will do very well for them. Once the shelter is found and the swarm establishes its homestead, the work begins. Beeswax is produced and honeycombs are made for storing food, providing space for the queen and the brood. Then the production of honey starts, providing the colony's main source of food. Pollen is gathered, thus giving the colony its protein sustenance. Without pollen, the colony cannot survive; the bees cannot utilise fresh pollen.

Once fresh pollen is collected and is stored in the cells, with some honey and the bees' own enzymes added, it undergoes lactic acid fermentation becoming the product that we call bee bread – biologically active and available nourishment.

Royal jelly is made for the queen because without a strong queen the colony has not got a bright future. Bees knew about hygienic behaviour millions of years ago and the beehive is one of the most sterile environments on earth. Propolis is made by bees that collect tree resins and then further metabolise them into a refined resin exhibiting strong antibacterial, antifungal and antiviral properties. Bees sterilise the brood cells with propolis before the eggs are laid.

Finally, bees defend their house with stingers full of venom. They are prepared to defend their sovereignty with their lives, as evidenced by the fact that once the sting is applied, the bee's body is actually ruptured and the bee dies.

These unbelievable creatures, many millions of years old, are completely sustainable and in harmony with nature. They give and take without harming, sweetly enriching the environment through nurturing all of its components. I believe that hive products should be first appreciated as a credible and desirable source of health cultivation, notwithstanding the fact that they are highly efficient and diversified when it comes to re-establishing health.

Apitherapy treatments

As a technique apitherapy is the medical use of the products of the honey bee hive often used with essential oils.

Apitherapy treatments are generally non-toxic and mild. Combining bee products with essential oils brings about the creation of powerful, non-synthetic remedies that work more efficiently. Through such techniques, we hope soon to have a unique apitherapeutic offering offering organic solution to many of the health challenges facing contemporary society.

Raw honey

Raw honey is the best-known product of the hive, and is a complex natural product consisting not only of sugars, but also an abundance of minerals, vitamins, enzymes and amino acids. Honey is one of the rare foods that has no known side-effects at all. It is not just a fabulous food, but an excellent source of energy. Some of its many benefits include improving the assimilation of calcium and magnesium, decreasing gastric acidity, helping with stubborn coughs, laxative properties, protection of the heart, a mild sedative when taken with warm drinks, and it has significant antibacterial and wound healing properties.

The consumption of flavoured honey is gaining in popularity even though it offers no additional benefit to the consumer. The flavour industry has learnt to analyse the molecules that make up a flavour. If the chemical structure of a particular flavour is known, then with the aid of a chemical tool-box one can copy that molecule and manufacture it industrially in a chemical plant. The negative effects, if any, of the use of such flavourants has yet to be established.

However, apitherapy recommends the use of aro-honeys – raw honey reinforced with organic essential oils. Essential oils are comprehensive and complex natural mixtures of plant chemicals expressing the plant's living energy and biological strength. Essentials oils impart their therapeutic activity through this noble, pleasant-tasting medium. The benefit to the consumer is obvious – the positive properties of honey are intensified through the essential oils' healing properties.

The Apimondia Apitherapy Commission works actively with the medical establishment in Cuba on the research and practical application of apitherapy products. Several aro-honeys have been formulated there and the research has proved that the results of their use were better than when conventional medications were prescribed alone. Honey and propolis have also been successfully used instead of antibiotics in wound treatment.

Honey in SA

The supply of honey in South Africa does not meet local demand. About 50% of the locally-consumed honey has to be imported, and is sometimes of questionable quality. Imported bee products are also irradiated to prevent the spread of bee diseases. Sometimes the information provided on labels does not disclose the origin of the honey, leaving the consumer in the dark about the real quality of the product. Fortunately, new regulations should rectify this problem and the South African consumer will be more informed on the quality of honey they use.

Pollen

Good quality honey contains pollen particles which help identify the origin of the honey as well. Bees protect the perpetuity of the plant kingdom, and in return, plants provide pollen thereby securing the existence of bees. Pollen is the main protein source for bees.

With the growing awareness for the need of additional supplementation in our diets, pollen and bee bread are gaining in importance and recognition. Bee bread is fermented, predigested pollen – biologically immediately available to the body. Both pollen and bee bread represent a rich source of amino acids, (all main amino acids are present), all classes of enzymes, and a wealth of minerals and vitamins.

They are usually recommended for daily use in treatment of

Africanised bees

In 1956 a prominent Brazilian scientist imported a few swarms from Southern Africa in a hope to breed bees better acclimatised to their tropical conditions than European bees were. The African bee seemed to offer a better solution compared to the European bee, which is not as aggressive as its African cousin but is also less productive. By accident, some of them escaped and quite a few unfortunate incidents happened, including a number of attacks on livestock and humans, with some deaths reported. Through interbreeding with local bees a new sub-species was created and given a name – Africanised bees. Despite its evil reputation among Americans, where the Africanised bee continues its relentless spread northwards, this highly adaptive hybrid exerts an overall positive effect in eco-systems where it has largely replaced indigenous bees. Although somewhat more aggressive than most European and native American species, the Africanised hybrid is very resilient and successful in most environments. Perhaps this is one case where human intervention in nature wasn't all bad. Today, Latin America supplies some of the best bee products in the world and has a thriving beekeeping industry. This year, they are celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Africanised bee. Shouldn't we also be celebrating?

nutritional deficiencies and for improving mental agility. Both are highly recommended as a prevention of prostate problems.

With the growing interest in South Africa in apitherapy, our beekeepers are rising to the challenge and starting to supply these precious products.

Propolis

Good quality raw honey contains particles of propolis (the tiny, brownish specks found in the honey) further enhancing its nutritional value. Propolis, the bees' own antibiotic, is increasingly being seen as a medicine for the 21st century.

The Japan Propolis Conference organisation states that propolis has the following properties: anti-cancer, immune system activation, antiseptic and antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, anaesthetic, anti-allergenic, stress-relieving, and even has blood-vessel reinforcing characteristics.

Propolis may offer an effective solution in treatment of antibiotic-resistant bacterial infections. It is also considered one of the few safe immunity-boosters which can be taken with antibiotics. It actually enhances the activity of antibiotics in many cases.

In 1985, a major research paper in Japan showed that propolis has anti-tumour properties and since then the awareness of the importance of ingesting propolis has grown rapidly. Propolis in Japan has ceased to be a fad, but has established itself as a major health food with a high level of health benefits, and Japan is now one of the world's biggest importers and consumers of propolis because of its reputation there as a broad-spectrum preventative treatment for a range of common health problems.

But, propolis faces challenges on its way to worldwide recognition. The modern consumer often becomes confused by its extensive range of properties, having been accustomed to taking a specific medication for a specific ailment. Education on the synergistic beneficial effects of propolis is therefore much needed here and in many other countries.

Royal jelly

Royal jelly, the legendary product of the hive, is found in minute quantities, and it is a highly respected nutritional supplement, containing among other ingredients sexual hormones and gamma-globulin. It is a celebrated and highly effective ingredient in skin rejuvenating creams and also well known for its tissue oxygenation and stimulation of physical, sexual and intellectual performance. It is highly recommended for the convalescing patients and the aging.

Bee Venom

BVT, or bee venom therapy, has been extensively promoted by

the American Apitherapy Association which keeps statistics and testimonials to establish scientific protocols for the application of this effective traditional therapy. Bee stings are applied at acupuncture points and are considered to be very effective, especially for cardio-vascular, neurological and rheumatological problems. Its immuno-stimulating mechanism may offer help for the diseases that conventional medicine cannot help.

Beeswax

Beeswax comes from the honeycomb, which is the bees' own storage cells for honey, and is also experiencing a come-back in the last two to three decades with a revival of interest in its application in natural medicine. It is used mostly in formulating natural creams and lotions, where it has antibacterial and anti-inflammatory effects. Beeswax creams revitalise and rehydrate aging skin, and are highly recommended for sensitive and allergy-prone skins. ○

The Propolis People

Dedicated to supplying only the best in locally produced honeybee products to you

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