

# EAG TALK

THE ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS GROUP

## A future without bees would certainly sting!



*Honeycomb dripping with honey from Barrett's Apiary in Barbuda.*

By Natalya Lawrence – GEF SGP National Coordinator

We don't think about it much: we go to the supermarket, the public market, vendors at the side of the road, and even in our own backyards, buying or harvesting food for our daily consumption.

Bees, while feared for their stings, and revered for their honey, are generally otherwise underestimated by us humans. We often fail to make the link between the food that we eat and the little bee, buzzing around our coconut blossoms.

There has been a recent uptick in the number of trained and practicing bee-

keepers in Antigua and Barbuda. In fact, very recently, our country, one of six, participated in an online beekeeping course, and we were among the first to have a 100 percent completion rate.

We have begun to embrace the value of bees, the vast benefits of honey and other value-added products from the hives, and apiculture (or beekeeping) is a strong source of additional, sustainable income. Let's not forget to highlight the importance of bees as pollinators, which support both food security and habitat restoration. Bees are a major pollinator, accounting for 33 percent of the world's crop pollination.

The Antigua Beekeepers' Cooperative recently concluded a project with the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme through funding from the IWeco Project (The Integrating Water, Land and Ecosystems Management in Caribbean Small Island Developing States). Through this project, veteran and newly trained beekeepers both in Antigua and Barbuda benefitted from mentorship from the only Master Beekeeper in the region, Mr Richard Matthias, from the Iyanola Apiculture Collective in St Lucia.

Mr Matthias visited several apiaries on both islands and gave hands-on advice

for improving apiculture in our country. Further, at suitable sites, where bee populations were strong, he was able to conduct a Varroa Mite test on the bees. Bees face several threats to their survival, the use of pesticides (for agriculture and also to control the mosquitoes), habitat loss (feral bees), pests, and diseases. In terms of pests, Varroa Mites, above a certain threshold, can cripple bee colonies and, of course, reduce honey production.

The varroa mite test, a simple alcohol wash with a sample of approximately 300 bees per apiary, revealed the presence of the mite in Antigua, but none in Barbuda. Barbudan beekeepers, keen



*Conducting a Varroa Mite Test.*



to keep the pest out of the island, implement strict biosecurity protocols, which includes the use of clean PPEs (bee suits, new gloves and tools) when visiting the island from Antigua. From this, Mr. Matthias also introduced beekeepers to an organic treatment for the mite, Aluen CAP, which he applied to two affected apiaries.

Another key aspect of the project was the rearing of queen bees. The queen, the largest bee in the colony, is the only female bee with fully developed ovaries. Her two primary functions are to produce pheromone scents that regulate the harmony of the colony, and, to lay a lot of eggs! Several sites on both islands were selected as primary sites for queen-rearing, and foraging grounds for the bees, near these sites were also investigated. It is important to ensure that food and water sources are available for a hive to remain strong.



*Honeycomb, dripping with honey.*

Covid-19 caused significant delays in the implementation of the project. While the project originally intended to begin rearing queens during its implemen-

tation period, when activities were in full swing, the time of the year was not conducive for this. Instead, the group focused on preparing the sites, procuring the

equipment and undergoing pre-training and mentorship. Queen-rearing is expected to take place in May, 2022.

An unexpected opportunity arose, through a sepa-



*Frame, bursting with honey.*



rate regional beekeeping project that included Trinidad and Tobago, St Vincent and the Grenadines, St Kitts, St Lucia, Dominica and Grenada. Because of this project, the beekeepers in Antigua and Barbuda were able to be placed under Mr Matthias's training.

Additionally, several beekeepers were able to take advantage of a newly developed technology to virtually monitor colonies. This technology, the Hive App, allows a beekeeper to keep records and track the activity of a colony without having to consistently open all the beehives. Further, it can detect temperature change in a hive, and warn of an impending swarm, before it takes place.

During the implementation of this project, it was a pleasure to watch the beekeepers care for the bees,



Hon. Min. Samantha Marshall passing frame to Luis Felipe López Calva ASG and UNDP Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean. (Photos by Natalya Lawrence)

with great fondness. It was amazing to see the beekeepers brush off bee stings as a thing of inconsequence. It was inspiring to see the work, and anticipate the future of beekeeping in Antigua and Barbuda, and it does look bright.

On behalf of the Antigua

Beekeepers' Cooperative, we say thank you to the strong supporters and collaborators who ensured the success of this project – Inter-American Institute for the Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Barbuda Affairs, and key actors for the re-

gional project - Apiculture and Biodiversity – A Nexus for Sustainable Development in rural sections of seven GEF SGP UNDP countries (Dominica, Grenada, Saint Kitts & Nevis, Saint Lucia, Samoa, and Trinidad and Tobago), particularly, Dr Sharda Mahabir.

## Observation

By Makeda Mikael

Woe be onto the Caribbean banks controlled by the politicians, where the only people that count are the expatriates and their demands on the savings of the poor!

Woe be onto the political directorate that allows the savings of the poor to be available to all but the small local businesses!

It has happened so many times, and right before our eyes, where some wannabe rich expatriate passing through, or on island on holiday, sees the wide open welcome for any development, hooks a politician, gets set up at a bank, and the rest is history.

We know them by name on this island. The bank then offers the savings of the lo-

## Indigenous banks are politically controlled

cals to the government-backed operator, and the great development breaks ground. Unfortunately, the poor depositor although part of the congregate owners of the bank by being part of the government share ownership, is not given the same respect by access to bank support and finance.

The new political nature of our banks with the government holdings and support, is clearly defined in the stranglehold which the government-placed Directors have on the local accounts. Governments of the Caribbean are accustomed to wilfully putting their uncooperative opposition and independently-minded persons out of business, with the help of the indigenous banks, where there is no appeal to overseas principals.

The collaboration between the islands which have hard currency through

tourism and drugs, and those who do not, causes distrust and collusion in hard currency movements, in and out of these islands. The crack-down by First and Second World on assistance from corresponding banks, has reduced the circulation of money on our island in recent years without serious explanations to our small business persons, leaving them no choice but to close their businesses, especially in Covid times.

Customer service in the indigenous banks is also politically controlled as those 'too-connected-to be-fired'-placements in the bank allow for local rudeness and slights understood by locals to become a standard part of banking in Antigua.

Just like high-end businesses, beach locations, hill-top residences and high-profile positions are kept for expatriates, non-

blacks, new nationals, and local rich and rising, same way the banks choose their special customers who get all of the cash, all of the customer service with smiles and courtesies, while tellers begrudgingly pitch papers and money contemptuously at their local customers.

Indigenous bank systems in Antigua need to be overhauled, and a seriously selected body placed between the Government and their ownership in the banks. This move to prevent the state-controlled corruption of putting people out business, stealing their lands and business prospects, all of which are expedited with the cooperation of the indigenous banks, will hopefully cease.

*Thoughts and views expressed in observations do not necessarily reflect the opinion of Observer Newsco, its management or staff.*