

# Los Angeles Times - BRANDX

## The buzz biz: Saving the bees

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Over the last three years, more than 50 billion honeybees have died, victims of the menacingly named "colony collapse disorder." This sad fact has been the center of much consternation (and, in some circles, out and out panic) as the fate of the bees is inextricably linked with our own.

The most important pollinators on Earth, bees are integrally linked to our food supply and their possible demise would be nothing short of apocalyptic, as no bees would eventually mean: *no people*.

"Globally, five billion pounds of insecticides are being put into our environment annually, the equivalent of filling 100-pound sacks of insecticides, side by side, that would encircle the entire equator. Worldwide the bees are acting like the modern day canaries in the coal mines alerting us to the toxicity in our environment."

These disturbing facts come from Dr. Reese Halter, a biologist and science writer whose recent book "The Incomparable Honeybee and the Economics of Pollination" tracks the fate of its subject in a tone that alternates between concern and joyful exuberance.

"Bees are an incredible insect," he continues. "They are indefatigable workers, awesome dancers (mostly in the dark), they navigate by the sun and work on the night of a full moon and they are incredible engineers: 2 pounds of bees wax can hold 20 pounds of honey, one hive holds over 77,000 perfect hexagonal cells, their honey is great for healing wounds, it's loaded with vitamins and minerals and . . . it tastes good."

All seem like good reasons to keep these hard-laboring insects around, and a desire to play "bee savior" has instigated a massive growth in individual bee-keeping, particularly in urban areas.

New York City just recently lifted a longtime ban on beekeeping, making

hundreds of local beekeepers happy -- and legal. In L.A., where no such ban exists, the urban bee-keeping community has been growing exponentially, in large part due to the efforts of one Kirk Anderson, a longtime beekeeper and a man who does not suffer fools gladly.

Anderson's philosophy is simple: "We call ourselves the Backwards Beekeepers 'cause we do everything ass-backwards, compared to everybody else. Everyone else is treating their hives, using chemicals. But we keep no dope bees."

And this "no dope" beekeeping is spreading like wildfire. The Backwards Beekeepers, which once boasted exactly three members -- Anderson and acolytes Amy Seidenwurm and Russell Bates -- now holds monthly meetings for more than 260 aspiring beekeepers.

"I hadn't had anyone call me about [being a] beekeeper in 30 years," remembers Anderson. "Then Amy and Russell called and the rest is history."

"We told friends and they told friends," explains Seidenwurm, "and we started growing. Kirk is not only fun to be around, but he's a wealth of information. We met him about beekeeping and we thought, 'Why not?' The bees needed help, we had a yard and it wasn't much work."

"Once you tell people you keep bees, their eyes just light up," adds Bates, "because they know the bees are in trouble. The thing that made the difference for me was meeting Kirk and hearing his philosophy and realizing that it would be interesting and not a lot of work to do this. If you raise bees naturally, it's not so daunting."

In fact, keeping bees the backward way seems to offer a host of rewards, and not just pounds of delicious honey.

"We need more beekeepers and we need them to be locals," confirms Dr. Halter. "And we need to reduce the amounts of insecticides, herbicides, fumigicides and miticides. We need to support organics and we need to realize without the bees we cannot survive."

"The Backwards Beekeepers have a real simple purpose," explains Anderson, "and that purpose is to change the world. We want to show people that you can keep bees, have chickens and grow something, connect with nature, all

without chemicals. And in doing that, you can save the world."

--Jessica Hundley

<http://www.thisisbrandx.com/2010/03/the-buzz-biz-saving-the-bees.html>