

Seven fairytale-like years: On December 20, 2017, the UN in New York unanimously declared WORLD BEE DAY – May 20!



The number seven is often called a magical, fairytale number, and on the seventh anniversary of the proclamation of World Bee Day by the United Nations (UN), we can recall that the initiative for this day was unanimously supported by all UN member states. We could say that it is a fairy tale spreading awareness about the importance of bees and other pollinators across the globe. Awareness that life cannot exist without bees and other pollinators, and that every third spoonful of food depends on the pollination by these insects, is growing every day. In this respect, both the proclamation of World Bee Day and the awareness of its purpose have exceeded our initial expectations. World Bee Day and its annual celebration on May 20 have contributed to improving conditions for bees and the field of beekeeping worldwide.

Boštjan Noč, President of the Slovenian Beekeepers' Association and the European Beekeeping Association, stated on this occasion:

"World Bee Day is a wonderful fairy tale, but, unfortunately, the current reality in beekeeping is far from a fairy tale!"

Around the world, awareness of the importance of bees and other pollinators is growing, the use of bee-harming plant protection products (PPP) has significantly decreased, the conditions for registering bee-harming PPP are being tightened, and the recognition of beekeepers' work has increased, leading to greater promotion of bee products and their use.

I would like to highlight both the first and the most recent major successes, which are also a result of the growing awareness of the importance of bees brought about by World Bee Day.

One of the first and most important measures introduced by the EU was that the European Commission and the European Parliament listened to our wishes and demands, which we highlighted during the promotion of the World Bee Day "project", and, as a result, **increased funding for the beekeeping sector by 70%**. The European Parliament has tightened the conditions for the use and registration of bee-harming plant protection products (PPP), while also encouraging the planting of nectar-rich plants, organic beekeeping, and more.

The most recent major success is that the European Commission and the European Parliament listened to Slovenia, which, together with Portugal, submitted a proposal to amend the Honey

Directive, finally establishing that all honey must be labelled with its exact country of origin. **It is a 'revolution' in terms of protecting consumers and beekeepers! Unfortunately, the transitional period is much too long!**



These seven years have not entirely been a fairy tale, as the special status of the 'pollination service' performed by bees is still not recognised. More than 30% of food depends on bee pollination, and the value of pollination is even greater in maintaining biodiversity in nature. Accordingly, bees are not only a part of agricultural policy but also a very important part of environmental policy. **It is high time that bees are granted the status they deserve for preserving the environment, and that financial resources from environmental measures are allocated to beekeepers as support for maintaining bee colonies, for every bee colony, and for all beekeepers!** Pollination services cannot be imported, which is why such support through environmental measures is crucial!

Another pressing issue is adulterated honey, as, according to the European Commission, 46% of honey on the market is adulterated. **It is high time to protect consumers.** We urgently need parallel initiatives: first, to quickly establish the appropriate legislation so that inspection services can remove adulterated honey from the market, and second, a joint promotional campaign to raise consumer awareness **that honey is consumed to strengthen health and that adulterated honey can harm health...** This is why consumers should buy honey directly from beekeepers or buy honey of a local origin. **Unfair competition will destroy beekeeping worldwide. Who will then provide the pollination service when there are no bees, which, sadly, cannot survive without beekeepers?**

Between 2014 and 2017, when we Slovenians collectively convinced the world of the urgent need to declare World Bee Day, we were united in Slovenia, Europe, and globally. It is up to all of us to once again show unity after seven years, to be aware of the goals of World Bee Day, and to boldly move forward with the realisation of two key objectives: the preservation of bees and beekeepers, and the protection of consumers. It is precisely due to the desire to achieve the two

mentioned goals that the European Beekeeping Association was established in April 2024, with its headquarters in Slovenia. I believe that the EBA will help us realise these objectives."



Thoughts on World Bee Day and the current state of beekeeping were also shared by the following:

Peter Kozmus, Vice President of Apimondia: World Bee Day and Global Beekeeping

World Bee Day has significantly contributed to solving many problems in beekeeping at the global level. Its key positive effects are:

1. Increased awareness of the importance of bees:

World Bee Day has drawn significant attention to the various challenges faced by global beekeeping. The main challenges include: the use of bee-harming pesticides, global climate change, habitat loss, new bee diseases, pests, and other related challenges. This leads to a better understanding of the needs of pollinators as an important part of both the ecosystem and the food system.

2. Support for more bee-friendly policies and legislation:

Some countries have introduced measures to reduce pesticide use, promote more sustainable farming, and protect bee-friendly habitats. WBD (World Bee Day) encouraged politicians at both the national and international level to ban or at least limit bee-harmful pesticides.

3. Promotion of education and research:

Increased global attention has led to a rise in funding for research aimed at addressing the challenges faced by bees. Educational programs for children and adults have expanded in countries where beekeeping was not previously a priority.

4. Promoting beekeeping as a tool for development:

World Bee Day has highlighted beekeeping as an important agricultural activity for improving the economic position of local communities, especially in impoverished regions of the world. Support for beekeeping in some developing countries has contributed to the creation of additional jobs and increased farmers' incomes.

5. Strengthening international cooperation:

Events organised on World Bee Day brought together scientists, beekeepers, and decision-makers. This has strengthened the exchange of knowledge and solutions, such as sustainable beekeeping practices that are better suited to local conditions.

World Bee Day has become an important platform for global action to protect bees and promote sustainable agriculture, directly contributing to food security and the preservation of biodiversity.

Dejan Židan, Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Food at the time of the proclamation of World Bee Day

Anniversaries are a time to reflect on the successes we have achieved in the past, with the goal of evaluating whether the path we are planning is ambitious enough and moving in the right direction. When we fought for World Bee Day, we were fighting not only for the recognition of the beekeeping sector worldwide but also to ensure that people understand that our actions will determine whether there will be enough food for everyone or if more and more people will go hungry on the planet. We succeeded! We succeeded on a symbolic level – at this very moment, the world recognises us as the champion of bees, pollinators, and the fight against hunger. But what we always need to ask ourselves is how we should act if we notice that our energy is running low. We are expected to continue the fight for pollinators, bees, and the fight against world hunger, and I sincerely hope that all the government bodies, NGOs, and other organisations that have supported us will continue to find this enthusiasm for promoting beekeeping and advancing beekeeping on an international level in the future. Slovenia may not be recognised for many things, but it is recognised for its beekeeping. Therefore, we are obligated to continue promoting Slovenian beekeeping and the Slovenian approach to both preserving pollinators and food production in the future. This is what is expected from us.

Tanja Strniša, State Secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food at the time of the proclamation of World Bee Day

World Bee Day also holds significance in diplomacy. Through various initiatives, Slovenian diplomats around the world raise awareness about the global importance of bees and pollinators for food security, the preservation of biodiversity, and the improvement of social conditions in rural areas. At the Slovenian Embassy in Prague, we educated others about bees by example, having our own beehive in the garden. From my experience in Czech Republic, I can say that the topic of bees opens all doors. Everyone can understand that bees are extremely significant for both people and the environment, and that we must protect them from the challenges that endanger their survival. In a world where political and economic divisions are becoming more pronounced, so-called 'bee diplomacy' is a positive and uncontroversial story that connects us, and through which we are also recognised and valued globally.