

**PERSPECTIVES IN HONEYBEE  
PRODUCTION:  
A GOZO CASE STUDY**

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY  
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**What does it mean to  
“bee” a beekeeper?**

# **TOPICS OF INTEREST**

- 1. Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD)**
- 2. Perceptions of Climate Change**
- 3. Community & Knowledge**
- 4. Beekeepers and their voice in environmental discourse.**

# GOZO, MALTA



- **122 sq. miles (807.1 times smaller than Oregon).**

# **FIELD SCHOOL: *OFF THE BEATEN TRACK***



- Cultural anthropology / ethnographic field school
- The Off The Beaten Track program started in 2006 and is now - with 20 editions over the past 11 years - the longest standing anthropology field school in the world.

# METHODS

- Field notes
- Interview (formal & informal)
- Participant Observation
- Sketches
- Pictures
- Soundscapes

## Written Report:

- Ethnography





# ADAM & THE BEES

- Adam, a 60-year-old man from Gozo, has been working with bees throughout the majority of his life. Now retired, Adam spends most days tending to his hives.
- Today, Adam tends to about 30+ hives. The species of bee that Adam works with is *Apis Mellifera Ruttneri* (a type of European honeybee).
- **“Never, nobody talked about this year last year, never, never. Never in my life”**



# COLONY COLLAPSE DISORDER (CCD)

- CCD:

First coined in January 2007 among a report from scientists at Pennsylvania State University who were researching the causes of substantial bee loss (Nimmo, 2015).

- In 2010, the USDA came to a consensus which stated that CCD is not caused by any single factor, but is the result of **a complex combination of multiple factors, which include certain agricultural pesticides, beekeeper-applied chemicals, poor nutrition, pathogens, and parasites** (Sommers-Cramer and Kleinsman 2013).

- Over the years, Adam has encountered a growing number of hives dying off.

***What is causing this?***





# PERCEPTIONS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

- A common expression in Gozo, July 2016:

**“Never in my life. Never in my life have I seen it this dry.”**

- Malta experienced the **driest winter in 93 years during 2016**, with temperature peaks at 76.3 degrees Fahrenheit in March, and February being the driest month on record since 1923 (MaltaToday.com.mt, 2016).

- Pollinator friendly plants & agricultural crops at risk.

- **“The climate has changed. There’s no guarantee anymore.”**  
(Adam, Interview, 2016)



## Climate Change in Malta's Context

- “The impact of climate change will lead to more extreme and haphazard weather patterns, with **prolonged Saharan-style heatwaves, more intense rainy periods and longer dryer spells**. This escalating rise in temperature will be accompanied by **severe water shortages** as rainfall in Malta is drastically reduced “by some 12 per cent,” according to [climatologist] Dr. Fenech” (Times of Malta, 2014).

### Paper of interest addressing climate change as a health threat

**Public Perceptions of Climate Change as a Human Health Risk: Surveys of the United States, Canada and Malta – Akerlof, et al. (2010): Pp. 2560, 2563**

“We recommend **mounting public health communication initiatives** that increase the salience of the **human health consequences associated with climate change.**”

“**Fifty percent** or more of Canadians and Maltese said that **climate change is already harming people's health**, while only slightly more than a third of Americans said the same. A majority in all three countries said that in the future climate change will likely cause poverty/reduced standards of living, water shortages, and disease (United States and Malta), and more severe/frequent hurricanes and heat waves (United States and Canada), **all of which either directly or indirectly undermine public health.**”







# RESPONDING TO CCD & CLIMATE CHANGE: BEEKEEPING AS AN ADAPTIVE PRACTICE



# COMMUNITY & KNOWLEDGE

- **Beekeeping** as a practice is influenced by the **objective necessities of pollinators**, but is complex and **subjective** due to the **differentiating behavior** of various honeybees and human intervention (**preferences of the beekeepers themselves**).
- Learning from “Old People”, fellow beekeepers, and the internet as a form of sustaining the practice of beekeeping on Gozo.



# BEEKEEPERS & THEIR ROLE IN ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSE

- Suryanarayanan & Kleinman write:

“The EPA, Bayer, and many academic scientists make it clear that beekeepers cannot make credible knowledge on their own and thus need to work with certified institutional environmental toxicologists and honey bee researchers, who are *the experts*. Doing so, however, means that the knowledge gets constructed in terms of the established agro-entomological form of expertise, and beekeepers’ influence is limited” (2013): 233.

**Listening to the hives, listening to the keepers.**

# A GLIMPSE AT BEEKEEPING IN GOZO



# THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS RESEARCH

The **perspectives** and **experiences of beekeepers** are valuable to understanding not only the **status of bees** and the way that status is reacted to, but the **relationship between bees and humans that is at risk.**

**“In 2006 and 2007, 40 percent of honeybees in the United States vanished and millions of hives around the world perished. At this time, the number of hives in the United States was approximately 2.4 million, which was less than half of what it was in 1950 .”**

(Jake Kosek. “ECOLOGIES OF EMPIRE: On the New Uses of the Honeybee.” *Cultural Anthropology* 25, no. 4 (2010): 650.)

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