

## The Garden Fairy The Birds and the Bees!!

BY FRANK ASHER



Jeff Miller of DC Honeybees with one of his urban hives.

I have always wondered why people refer to sex as the birds and the bees. (“The birds do it. The bees do it”.) Certainly, in spring, the birds are doing it.

But the bees? They are rarely having sex. The queen gets it once and then she has to lay eggs her whole life.

I think bees deserve our attention because they do so much for us, yet we take them for granted.

Without bees, we’d all be in serious trouble. We need bees to pollinate our vegetables and fruit. Plants need pollinators to reproduce. But now honeybees need us in a big way cause they are in a fight for their lives. There has been an alarming decrease of bee populations worldwide, known as Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) over the past few years.

There is a movement to get honeybees into the urban environ-

ment, and leading the movement is Jeff Miller at D.C. Honeybees. (dchoneybees.com)

I recently had the chance to talk with Jeff. It is always great to chat with a person who has a mission to help, especially when that mission is connected to mother nature. I think his work will definitely pay off in some sweet rewards in the coming year. And OLD CITY green will be helping the effort by soon becoming home to its own beehive.

**Frank: Jeff, how many hives have you set up in the D.C. area?**

**Jeff:** Tacoma Park, Logan Circle, Fort Totten, Georgetown, Mt Vernon, Capitol Hill and soon two new ones in the Shaw neighborhood, including OLD CITY green.

**Frank: How do bees fare in the inner city?**

**Jeff:** First off, the competition isn’t so tough. Bees have less to worry about in the city. For example, the main killer of hives is a mite called “varroa destructor”. These mites destroy whole hives. There are fewer mites in the city.

There are fewer pollinators in the urban area as well. This allows the bees a wider source of pollen for themselves.

Also, there are longer periods of nectar flow in the urban areas because of all the trees. This keeps the bees busy. Another great thing for our bees in our inner cities is that there are fewer pesticides.

**Frank: So, could we say that urban bees are in paradise?**

**Jeff:** Well, yes. There is what is called “Bee Colony Collapse Disorder.” But urban bees can create a micro laboratory that creates a stronger healthier, happier bee that is immune to common diseases.

**Frank: That has got to have an impact on the honey. When does one usually harvest honey?**

**Jeff:** Early summer in June or July. We can harvest 100 lbs. of honey each year from hive we create. We split that with the bee owner for an extraction fee.

Now with your hive that is arriving soon, I will wait till next year so the bees have enough time to save honey up for the winter. Next summer you will have 50lbs of honey. Honey sells for \$9.00 to \$10.00 a pound.

**Frank: \$10.00 a pound for honey? Old City green may expand its product line next year.**

Well folks you heard it here!!

Honeybees have invaded the District of Columbia. I could not be happier. If we create a bit of paradise for the bees, they will co-create a bit of paradise for us. I say that’s a win, win situation.

### A WEB OF CONNECTION

Now, since I have just shared with you a story about our precious pollinators, I offer a few simple requests.

1) The next time you go shopping for herbs, vegetables, flowers, shrubs or trees, consider creating a place/space for other living creatures to live. Bees, butterflies, birds, worms, lady bugs, praying mantises, all need a place to live.

2) It was recently discovered that 20% of the energy created through photosynthesis in plants is sent directly to the root system to nourish the fungi and bacteria in the soil, which in return draw the minerals from the soil for the plant to survive.

Please use plants and soil to encourage this balancing act between plants, bugs and soil. Use only organic pesticides for the unwanted bugs like white flies and aphids.

3) Remember that all of us are a part of this world. We all can use a helpful hand now and then. If the birds, the bees, the worms and the plants, the fungi and the bacteria do it, so can we humans assist them and each other in co-creating our paradise.

*Frank Asher is owner/founder of OLD CITY green “Where people and plants come together.” (9th and N St. NW). ♦*