



*Linking local ecological knowledge on
artisanal honey harvesting and beekeeping in
a changing world*

Greetings!

I would like to introduce you to the “Sentimiel” initiative.

Funded by the Foundation for Biodiversity Research (Fondation pour la Recherche sur la Biodiversité, FRB: <http://www.fondationbiodiversite.fr>), Sentimiel is an operation with the twin aims of constructing a network of cooperative initiatives (informal groups, associations, and others) at the international level – in North and South countries, in all parts of the world from circumpolar regions, through the temperate zone and the tropics – and to ensure, through this network, the monitoring of effects of global changes, viewed through the prism of their impact on bees and on their production of honey and associated products.

The fundamental challenge of the Sentimiel initiative is to valorize traditional local knowledge tied to beekeeping and honey collecting (including the “hunting” of honey of wild bees) through a network that centralizes the coordinates and the characteristics of the groups of people concerned by these activities. The goal is to federate diverse local actors who possess empirical knowledge about bees and their productions and who, by their regular observation of the activity of these insects, also possess records and data about the impact of global changes on their local environment.

Since the last Apimondia congress that was held in Montpellier (France) in September 2009, the function that bees can play as sentinels of the environment no longer needs to be demonstrated. Bees alert us to a multitude of changes in our environment, most of these changes being of human origin, particularly when these changes operate below threshold levels that are not directly perceptible by humans. Bees often warn us about changes we ourselves may not see. Nevertheless, analysis of the information delivered by bees has so far been focused on the domestic honeybee in the context of professional or semi-professional beekeeping. Knowledge based on subsistence honey collecting, which concerns an incredible diversity of honey-producing bees, has so far been completely ignored.

Sentimiel’s first ambition is to gain international recognition for this widespread but neglected knowledge, and to give those who hold it the means to obtain funding from sources which would otherwise be inaccessible to them.

Making this knowledge more visible would permit, on the one hand, ending the isolation of cooperative initiatives that have decided to adhere to the project. The prospective objective of the project is to increase our understanding of the consequences of global change for the world’s biodiversity by constituting an international citizen-science network, building a common base of very precise and very localized empirical observations by knowledgeable actors. All those with a passion for the world of bees can thus join together in a collaborative action that valorizes their knowledge and contributes, at the international level, to management that is more respectful of nature.

In addition, this network will facilitate access to funding by large international agencies that may finance participatory research-action projects targeting problems or issues raised locally by members of the network. Funding might also be attracted in support of initiatives to preserve local cultural heritage endangered by globalization.

Please feel free to contact me for any further information you would like to have about the Sentimiel initiative, and thanks in advance for your precious help in establishing this ambitious project.

edmond dounias

ethnobiologist at the Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD)

Chair of Sentimiel initiative

Sentimiel Initiative

UMR5175 CEFE - Campus CNRS - 1919, route de Mende - 34293 Montpellier cedex 5, France

☎ (+33) 467613315 / 📠 (+33) 467613336

@ edmond.dounias@ird.fr / 🌐 <http://www.cefe.cnrs.fr/sentimiel>