

MORE THAN HONEY

A film by MARKUS IMHOOF



A production by
zero one film, allegro film, Thelma Film and Ormenis Film

In co-production with
SRF Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen / SSR SRG, Bayerischer Rundfunk, ORF

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2012 – documentary – German/English – DCP/ 35mm - 1:1,85 – Dolby Digital - 91 min.

www.morethanhoneyfilm.com
www.morethanhoney.ch

www.morethanhoney.de
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SYNOPSIS

Over the past fifteen years, numerous colonies of bees have been decimated throughout the world. The causes of this disaster haven't yet been established. Depending on the regions of the world concerned, between 50% and 90% of the bees have disappeared.

This epidemic, of colossal violence and breadth, is spreading from beehive to beehive all over the planet. Everywhere, the same scenario is repeated: billions of bees leave their hives, never to return. No bodies are found in the immediate surroundings. No visible predators. In a few months, the bees have thus literally been vanishing in the US, where the latest estimates are that a total of 1.5 million (out of 2.4 million total beehives) have disappeared in 27 states. In Germany, according to the national beekeepers association, one fourth of the colonies have been decimated, with losses reaching up to 80% in some farms. The same phenomenon has been observed in Switzerland, France, Italy, Portugal, Greece, Austria, Poland and England, where the syndrome has been baptized "the Mary Celeste Phenomenon", after the name of the ship whose crew had vanished in 1872.

Scientists have found a name for the phenomenon that matches its scale: "colony collapse disorder". They have good reason to be worried: 80% of plant species need bees to be pollinated. Without them, no pollinisation, hence practically no fruits or vegetables. Three thirds of the cultures that feed humanity depend on them. *Apis mellifera* (honey bee) appeared on Earth 60 million years before man and is as indispensable to the economy as it is to man's survival.

Should we incriminate pesticides and the medication used to combat them? Parasites such as varroa mites? New viruses? Travelling stress? The multiplication of electromagnetic waves disturbing the magnetite nanoparticles found in the bees' abdomen? It seems that it is rather a combination of all these agents that has been destroying the bees' immune defenses.

Fifty years ago, Einstein had already insisted on the dependence relation that bound the pollen gatherers to mankind: **"If bees were to disappear from the globe," he had predicted, "mankind would only have four years left to live."**

The MAIN PROTAGONISTS

My project wasn't to shoot a global film that would go at top speed from one place to the next, but rather to take the time to get to know and understand the different protagonists, generally bee keepers, whom we met, and whom we approached with a mix of tenderness and anger. All of them expressed their personal opinions. Even if they inspire or suggest a number of broader themes, we mainly sought to get to know them better as human beings. We observed their daily work, took their existential anguish quite seriously and suffered with them when yet another bee colony disappeared or had to be destroyed. For their part, they showed us how they face the daily paradox, which consists in working both with nature's rhythm and against it.

Markus Imhoof

FRED JAGGI



Fred Jaggi sets great stores by tradition. For him, it is an ingredient in his recipe for success. This also implies that he exclusively keeps bees of a "local black breed", known for swarming a lot, but also for producing more honey. "Their place is here, in the mountains, and it has to remain so." The yellow bees (belonging to a beekeeper in the nearby valley) that sometimes wander over to his place are a great source of annoyance for him. One of his queens was just fecundated by a yellow drone and has been laying the eggs bearing the little half-breeds. With assured gestures, Jaggi seizes the treacherous queen, scolds her some more for her infidelity, then severs her head by pressing his thumbnail on the edge of the honeycomb.

JOHN MILLER



Enormous machines move like great robot insects between the rows of trees planted at a minute-precise distance from each other, and shake the almond trees to make the fruits fall. John Miller is standing at one end of the orchard, observing the harvest. "Blowers" suck up the almonds on the ground and the seasonal workers sort them on a conveyer belt. Miller is satisfied. "These almond trees were pollinated by bees that came from Australia, the almonds grew in the US and now they're sent to Spain where they'll be peeled and grilled. Then they'll take a plane to Japan, where they'll be used for the preparation of a traditional dessert. It will have taken four continents to make a cake. A gigantic collective performance, if you will." Yet, all the self-derision in the world won't fool anyone: John Miller has doubts. He is one of the wheels in a mechanism that generates billions of dollars of income, but it is obvious that this unlimited growth cannot be maintained indefinitely. Miller can't jump ship. Agricultural economy needs bees, and he needs this job.

HEIDRUN AND LIANE SINGER



Heidrun Singer is wearing magnifying glasses and, armed with a minuscule spoon, she scoops the young larvae out of the honeycomb. "We're giving nature a little nudge," she said, laughing. We can dupe the bees and 'reprogram' them, a bit like a hacker! In principle, these larvae are destined to become ordinary workers, but once they've been placed in an artificial royal cell, the workers start feeding them royal jelly and thus turn

them into queens!" Heidrun's family has been in beekeeping for three generations, and her daughter is already learning the ropes of the trade. "My breed of bees results from centuries of rigorous breeding: they aren't aggressive and produce a lot of honey. Which means that my queens are much sought-after throughout the world."

PROFESSOR RANDOLF MENZEL



A neurobiologist from the Freie Universität of Berlin, professor Menzel is "the bee whisperer". "A bee can't survive on its own. This is why we speak of 'super-organism'." This means that we consider a bee colony as one single large animal, whose workers constitute the 'body', while the drone and the queen are the male and female 'sexual organs'. A colony consists of approximately 50,000 bees, and each of them has 950,000 nervous cells. When connecting them adroitly, they have at their disposal the calculation power of nearly 500 billion nervous cells!

A human brain has a mere 100 billion.... The further professor Menzel takes us into the depth of the extraordinary organism that the swarm constitutes, the more remote and unreal human life appears.

ZHANG ZHAO SU



At home, in the North of China, Zhang Zao distributes small portions of pollen into small packets with a red apple printed on them, and then sells them to peasants for 5 yuans apiece.

Hundreds of people are perched in the trees, pollinating the flowers with Q-tips or a bamboo stick on which a tuft of hen down has been affixed. The pollen is in a small glass jar that the workers carry around their necks. Among them are a lot of young

women – they are light and can climb the trees' young branches without damaging them. Concentrated and effective, the workers carry out their work, one flower at a time. But time is running out, the apple tree are in bloom for only four to five days and some rain has been announced.

FRED TERRY



In Arizona, Fred Terry places the killer bees that he's just captured under a roof, in a structure set apart. But instead of killing them, he gives them sugared water. The bees drink avidly. "These are not lapdogs like the "normal" domestic bees; these are wolves. That's why they don't get sick. They are perfect honeybees too. You just need to avoid provoking them..."

MARKUS IMHOOF – director

My intention was to allow the spectators to understand the drama that is at play thanks to highly sensory images and, beyond the very real stories of the “minuscule” bees, to highlight a much vaster context: the pressure caused by the continually growing pyramid of the global economy, at the base of which we can find – we ought not to forget – the insects.

This is the main reason why I decided take great care to make the bees visible and have the spectators learn to know them better. Their immense, hairy eyes and their carapace make them resemble fascinating creatures that have come from another planet and who, on screen, appear as big, and most of the time even bigger, than men.

There is a moment, in the struggle opposing the bees to the neo-liberal market economy, when a bee broker pushes beekeepers, and the latter push their bees, to further increase their performance. Bees have become chain workers, a machine expected to function upon the simple push of a button.

At the risk of sounding presumptuous, I could almost say that the film is a bit like Chaplin’s “Modern Times”, as told by the bees.

Markus Imhoof

Markus Imhoof was born in 1941 in Winterthur. He studied Literature, Art and History at the University of Zurich. He worked as assistant to Leopold Lindtberg at the Zurich Schauspielhaus.

Filmography (selection) :

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|------|---|
| 1980 | DAS BOOT IST VOLL
with Tina Engel, Curt Bois, Mathias Gnädinger |
| 1986 | DIE REISE
with Markus Boysen, Corinna Kirchhoff, Will Quadflieg |
| 1990 | DER BERG
with Susanne Lothar, Mathias Gnädinger, Peter Simonischek |
| 1991 | LES PETITES ILLUSIONS |
| 1996 | LES RAISONS DU COEUR
with Elodie Bouchez, Laurent Gréville, Sylvie Testud, Bruno Todeschini |
| 2012 | MORE THAN HONEY |

PIERRE-ALAIN MEIER - coproducer

Markus Imhoof first started developing this project alone, with his son-in-law Boris Baer and his daughter Barbara, both PhDs in Biology, researchers and passionate about bees. Currently based in Australia, they specifically study the differences between the immune systems of the wild and domestic bees.

*Then, he managed to convince the German producer **Thomas Kufus**, from **zero one film**, to join in the project. Thomas Kufus placed his whole structure (his company based in Berlin includes fifteen or so employees, a number of whom were associated quite directly with project development, location, dramaturgy, etc.) at the disposal of the Swiss director. Later on, **Helmut Grasser**, **Allegro Film's** Austrian producer, also joined the project.*

In Switzerland, I made Markus a proposal, as for our previous production (Fire in Paradise, 1996), to share 50/50 the production risks, as well as the rights on the revenues.

Before we even started filming, we had to invent 'made to measure' tools to film the bees the way actors are filmed in fiction films: with the ability to accompany their actions in space with tracking shots, crane movements and panoramic views so as to give them the stature of true protagonists. A fourth of the film was thus filmed in a studio, but a studio located in nature.

Given this fact, the film was relatively costly, nearly 3 million francs. But this is mainly due to the fact that Markus is proposing a different film, shot on four continents, a shoot that took over a year, with material that was sometimes sophisticated, that we were able to convince both the Schweizer Radio Fernsehen (and RTS & RSI) in Switzerland and the Bayerische Rundfunk in Germany, as well as the ORF in Austria to take an interest in our project.

Pierre-Alain Meier, Thelma Film

Press Echo USA

"This is the CITIZEN KANE of bee documentaries. "

Ain't It Cool News

"Richly documented and lavishly photographed – Imhoof obtains stunning images of (bees) at work. "

Screen Daily

"..effective melding of science and aesthetic delights. "

Indiewire

"You feel, like going into a magical, Narnia like world"

WKCR Radio New York

MORE THAN HONEY – Awards

AUSTRIAN FILM AWARD 2013

„Best Sound Design“

SWISS FILM AWARD 2013

„Best Documentary“ & „Best Film Music“

GERMAN FILM AWARD 2013

„Best Documentary“

BAVARIAN FILM AWARD 2012

„Best Documentary“

ZURICH FILM AWARD 2012

„Best Documentary“

ROMY AWARD AUSTRIA 2013

„Best cinema documentary“

„Best producer – cinema documentary“

PRIX WALO SWITZERLAND 2012

„Best Film“

SOLOTHURNER FILMTAGE 2013

„Audience Award“

SANTA BARBARA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2013

„Best Documentary“

UK GREEN FILM FESTIVAL AUDIENCE AWARD 2013

SAN FRANCISCO GREEN FILM FESTIVAL 2013

„Best Feature“ Award

MORE THAN HONEY – Festivals

2012:

Locarno International Film Festival, Switzerland - World Premiere

Toronto International Film Festival, USA

Vancouver International Film Festival, Canada

Warsaw Film Festival, Poland

CHP:DOX, Denmark

Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival, Estonia

IDFA, The Netherlands

Doha Tribeca Film Festival, Qatar

Goa film Festival, India

Kerala Film Fest, India

Chennai Film Fest, India

2013:

DocPoint - Helsinki Documentary Film Fest, Finland

Santa Barbara Film Fest, USA

Göteborg International Film Festival, Sweden

Powell River Film Fest, Canada

Vilnius International Film Festival, Lithuania

Hong Kong Film Fest

and more

Credits (selection):

Director / Script	Markus Imhoof
Editor	Anne Fabini
DoP	Jörg Jeshel
macro camera	Attila Boa
Sound	Dieter Meyer
Sound design	Nils Kirchhoff
Sound mix	Bernhard Maisch
Music	Peter Scherer
Producers	Thomas Kufus, zero one film Helmut Grasser, allegro film Pierre-Alain Meier, Thelma Film Markus Imhoof, Ormenis Film
World Sales	Films Boutique

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