

Black Bee Læsø

Short introduction to the "Black Bee Story".

Presentation at the SICAMM conference 10-12 September 2004.

Look at www.sicamm.org.

The SICAMM conference on the Island of Laesoe had 67 participants from 11 countries. The conference had a large exposure in the Media. Danish Television 1 and 2 were there and at channel 1 there were presentations from the conference in the evening news.

Asger Søgaard Jørgensen gave a presentation on the problems for the conservation of the Black Bee on Laesoe.

The Black Bee is the last remaining population of the original Black Bee in Denmark. It is adapted to the climatic conditions and the Flora of the Island. It has tolerance to winter diseases and is a quite efficient honey producer.

30 beekeepers on the Island keep Black Bees and have about 250 colonies. We estimate that about 7 other beekeepers have less than 200 colonies of other races many of which are Black or Crosses with Black bees.

A huge amount of documentation is available to show the rationale behind the conservation. We have a viable and pure Black Bee on Laesoe.

1992 Denmark adopted the Rio-convention. We have obligations to conserve biodiversity.

An international evaluation has concluded that the Black Bee of Laesoe is worth while conserving and that the efforts to conserve the Black Bee are valuable.

1993 Laesoe was after many years of struggle finally declared a conservation area for the Black Bee. Imports of other bee races and genetic material were forbidden. Beekeepers with other races were obliged the change there bees to Black bees or stop beekeeping. Of course compensation were granted in case of losses.

A small group of beekeepers continued the battle against the conservation area. After long and complicated law suits at local and even the European court the legal battle were finally over in 2000 when the conservation area were confirmed legal.

Finally we thought that the Black Bee were safe. But a few beekeepers continued to obstruct the conservation.

Then we changed our government in 2001 to a liberal government. They wanted to evaluate the rationale behind the conservation again. A working group were formed with no scientist or professionals with knowledge of bees or beekeeping.

In 2002 they presented a report with the conclusion that the conservation of the Black Bee were justified. But they gave 4 solutions to the politicians to consider:

1. to keep the conservation
2. to allow other bee races on most of Laesoe, but to reserve a small mating station for Black Bees on the Eastern most part of Laesoe.
3. to suspend the conservation for a period of time to see what would happen.
4. to abolish the conservations totally.

Scientist and professionals were not involved but we all recommended to keep the conservation.

In favour of the beekeepers with other bee races the government promoted strongly solution 2. As a result the parties involved made an agreement in may 2004 trying to implement solution 2. No scientists were involved to give their advice.

As a result of the agreement other bee races should be removed from the mating area immediately.

In June we found hives with Italian bees hidden in the forest in the mating area and we informed the Ministry that the agreement did no longer exist.

The scientific reports at the SICAMM conference clearly stated that the Black Bee of Laesoe is unique and deserves to be conserved. Laesoe is not big enough to allow other bee races on the Island. Some introgression has happened, but we know that there are enough pure Black Bees to make the conservation viable.

The Danish Beekeepers Association propose to the government to.

Enforce the conservation allowing no other bee races on Laesoe.

Until this is done to support the beekeepers with Black Bees with some compensation for the extra work load in producing pure black bees.

We think that when only Black Bees are on Laesoe the beekeepers will be able to produce and sell breeding material to other parts of Europe. They will be able to sell their honey at a quite high price to tourist.

Beekeeping will be sustainable on the Island, and the conservation of the diversity that exists within the Black Bees on the Island will be conserved as natural matings will be possible.

The SICAMM conference signed a resolution that was sent to the ministry and to the parlements commission for Agriculture, fisheries and food.

Asger Søggaard Jørgensen