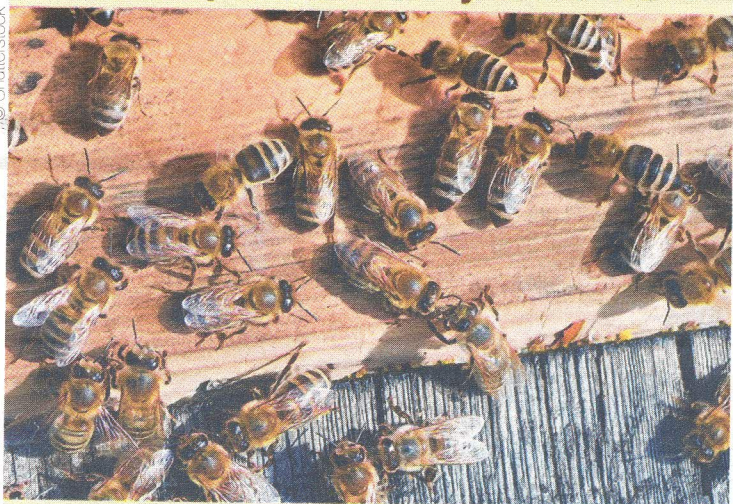


## OFFSIDE

ALAN HOPE

**Brussels spells biodiversity with a bee**

Imagine the sleepy heat of a summer afternoon, the gentle hum of bees a-buzzing, the air heavy with the scent of traffic from one of the main Brussels thoroughfares.

Believe it or not, that's a scene from a platform four floors up on the administrative centre of the city of Brussels, where the municipal authorities have installed three beehives.

The installation is part of the city's commitment to Year of Biodiversity 2010 and an initiative of the beekeeping association Apis Bruoc Sella (ABS). "Bees survive better in the city than in the countryside because they have fewer problems with pesticides used by farmers," said Marc Wollast, coordinator of ABS.

With the growth of intensive farming and increasing monoculture (the growing of a single crop on vast tracts of land), nowadays city bees actually have access to more varied sources of food. "It looks as if they'd have nothing surrounding them on the platform but metal and glass, but in fact right next to the administrative centre there are parks, gardens and trees, all of them excellent food sources."

The world of apiculture has been hit in recent years by a wave of mass losses, in what has become known as Colony Collapse Disorder. The causes are thought to be multiple, including mites, bacteria, viruses and malnutrition. More speculatively, some suspect genetically-modified crops and even radiation from mobile phone masts causing bees to lose their navigational powers, wander from the hive and die. The problem is of importance not only to apiculturists, but to agriculture in general, as many crops require bees for pollination.

Although it is their most urban project, this is not ABS' first venture at introducing bees to the city. Last year, they placed hives at the Massart botanical garden in Oudergem, on the roof of the Cameleon store in Sint-Lambrechts-Woluwe and in a school in Jette.

One of the hives on the outskirts of Brussels has been fitted with a webcam to allow you to watch bees entering and leaving all day long. The honey from the city of Brussels hives, meanwhile, is on sale inside the administrative centre.

*See page 11 for family bee activities this month*

[www.apisbruocsella.be](http://www.apisbruocsella.be)