



# ACTIVITY REPORT 2020



**February 2021**  
**Louvain-la-Neuve**  
**Belgium**

## FOREWORD BY OUR PRESIDENT



### **We are in a suspended time...**

2020: an apparent calm, predictable and planned, but also... incredibly... unexpected. Epidemics have determined much of the fate of our species over the centuries. It was not clear exactly when and what type, but there is no question that we have built the best conditions for new and terrible pandemics. A year that we will not easily forget... which did not only generate pain, deprivation, suffering and limitation; also gave us more time to stop and think.

Many did not want and persist in not wanting to take note of it. On the one hand, the painful outcome of the three-way confrontation (Trilogue), between the Commission, the Council, and the European Parliament, crushed most of the ambitions and objectives for biodiversity of the new Common Agricultural Policy. We continue battling for them to include a "Pollinator index" in the final legislative text. This Index aims at adequately measuring the impact the CAP has on pollinators and the pollination services they provide. Additionally, the United Kingdom and France even go as far as to re-authorize neonicotinoids, pesticides that proved to have terrible and persistent effects on pollinators and nature.

We, beekeepers and farmers of Bee Life European Beekeeping Coordination, will continue to introduce bees and beekeepers as essential partners for a different, modern, and innovative agriculture. We know it is possible and there are no alternatives, so we can only trust that Member States and the European Union will come to their senses ... and soon!

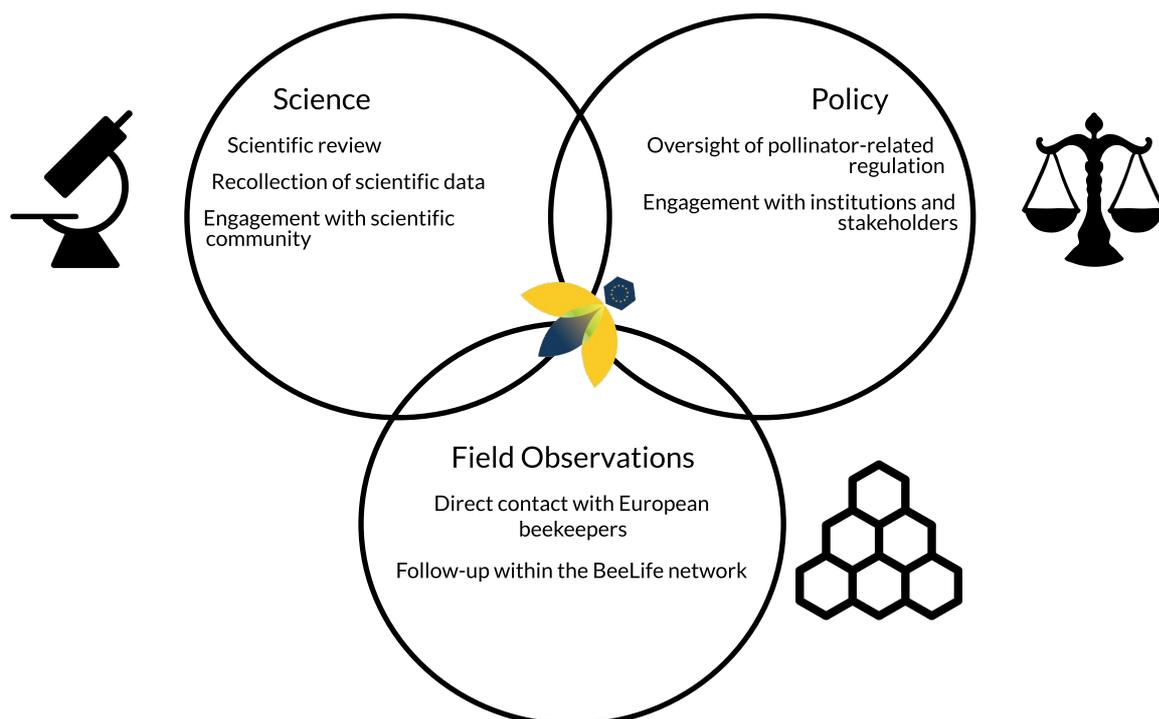
Francesco Panella

President of BeeLife

# BEE LIFE EUROPEAN BEEKEEPING COORDINATION

BeeLife European Beekeeping Coordination is an association formed by beekeepers and farmers from different European Union countries. It works to protect bees, pollinators and biodiversity, based on the principle that 'bees serve as the canary in the gold mine, sounding the alarm that something is wrong in the environment'. BeeLife is currently a member of the Save the Bees Coalition [1], a registered stakeholder in the EU Bee Partnership, the developer of a new online platform to centralise and communicate pollinator-data (The Bee Hub and the EU Bee Partnership Prototype Platform on Bee Health), as well as a former partner in the European-funded project, the Internet of Bees.

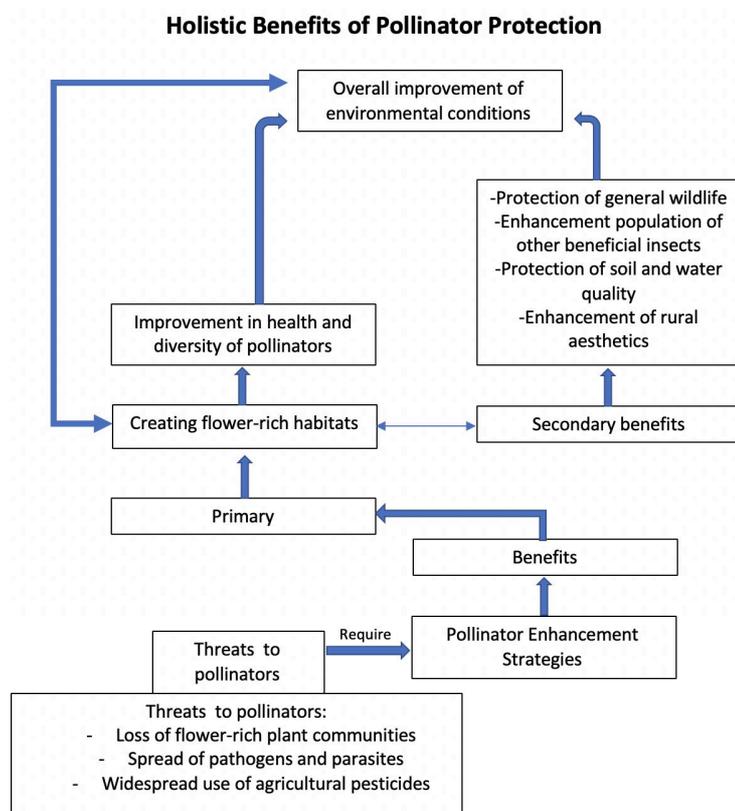
Bees and other pollinators are at the centre of BeeLife's work. They are ideal indicators of environmental health, and they are also necessary for our food safety. Their decline puts in peril the sustainability of our food system, along with the health and cultural benefits that depend on it. Besides, understanding the strong bond that humans and bees have shared for thousands of years, we insist on the cultural value that bees and beekeeping have.



## PROTECTING POLLINATORS

Bees teach us to think in large scale and long-term, particularly when we need to take into account that:

- Reports show a high decrease in biodiversity worldwide, particularly in contexts with intensified agriculture;
- Butterflies and wild bees populations are decreasing over time;
- Beekeepers have struggled to maintain their populations of honey bees over the last thirty years;
- Main problems observed in agricultural areas, where a confluence of stressing factors for bee health coexist, such as lack of nutritional sources, pesticide exposure, or loss of habitat.



Wratten, S. D., Gillespie, M., Decourtye, A., Mader, E., & Desneux, N. (2012). Pollinator habitat enhancement: benefits to other ecosystem services. *Agriculture, Ecosystems & Environment*, 159, 112-122.

Pollinators have a strong link with wildlife and biodiversity's general well-being, which we value and defend. Places with intensified agricultural practices have seen a steady decline in pollinators and a degradation of Nature in general, but new opportunities to counter such conditions continue to rise. From the application of new techniques to dismissing unnecessary and high-risk practices, for example, those that involve prophylactic use of plant protection products (pesticides), professional farming practices are opening up to new methods that diminish negative impacts on the environment.

BeeLife is continuously working to put an end to such unsustainable practices. We can achieve a new agricultural model that sets bees, pollinators in general and life at the core of its objectives. BeeLife's vision of a safer environment for pollinators takes into account the practical steps to achieve it. More sustainable and innovative agricultural practices and improving collaborations between farmers and beekeepers are part of BeeLife's vision.

Achieving our core objective of protecting bees and pollinators relies on cooperation with institutional agents, researchers and stakeholders. BeeLife works to maintain a link with representatives of European institutions such as the European Food Safety Authority, DG Agriculture and DG Environment of the European Commission, and Members of the European Parliament. The goal is to achieve a multiparty collaboration between beekeepers, researchers, farmers, environmentalists and European institutions, ultimately so that different actors understand and adopt their role in pollinator protection and fostering their well-being.

# 2020 IN REVIEW

## OUR ASSOCIATION

### Working together for pollinators

With two new members from Ireland (FIBKA) and Germany (DIB), our network of beekeepers and active agents working to protect pollinators continues to grow. We continuously explore new partnership opportunities, whether for new members or other types of collaborations for project development and joint advocacy.

BeeLife experienced some exciting changes in its internal affairs. First, during the General Assembly of February 2020, two representatives joined the Board of Directors. Anna Ganapini from CONAPI (Italy) [2] and Lasse Hellander from Biodlarna (Sweden) [3] are now active members of our Board.

Anna Ganapini is a third-generation beekeeper and a producer member of CONAPI since 2011. She leads 450 hives with organic certification in the Apennine mountainous region (Italy). She is also the current director of CONAPI, since 2016, the administrator of UNAAPI [4] (National Union of Bee Associations) since 2019, and the Vice-president of the Honey Group at the Confederation of Italian farmers [5].

Lasse Hellander is an experienced organic farmer, with over 52 years of experience, and 40 years of working with bees. His primary focus is on improving the agricultural system aiming towards the expansion of organic farming and beekeeping. He has been a member of the Administrative Board and the executive committee for the Swedish Beekeepers Association (Biodlarna) for seven years, also working on EU affairs.



BeeLife General Assembly Celebrated in February 2020



### Members of BeeLife as of December, 2020

Additionally, existing members welcomed two new associations joining the BeeLife community. The German Beekeeping Association Deutscher Imkerbund (DIB) [6] is now a full member of BeeLife. The German Beekeeping Association promotes and disseminates beekeeping to preserve a nature-rich environment through honeybees' pollination activity on wild and cultivated plants. They encourage the close interweaving of nature conservation and the safeguarding beekeeping interests.

Another new addition is the Federation of Irish Beekeepers Association (FIBKA) [7], who joined BeeLife as an associate member. FIBKA has a rich history in promoting beekeeping activities and promotes a balance with healthy ecosystems. It works closely with local associations to ensure the exchange of knowledge and represents beekeepers interests at the national level and beyond.

In 2020, to face the ongoing challenges and restrictions that restrict physical participation, BeeLife also modified its statutes to enable members and the Board of Directors to make decisions and voting using online tools. Online meetings and digital tools are now formally recognised as legitimate spaces to ensure processes of decision-making.

# OUR ACTIVITIES

## THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY

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The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is a complex subject with a multidimensional set of challenges and opportunities. Besides the direct contact and advocacy that BeeLife conducts, we have also been increasingly insisting on further collaborations with our members. To improve our efforts for change at the European level, we have been further stimulating national and regional actions. We seek to improve teamwork and provide our members with some tools and information to contribute locally to European matters.

In 2020, BeeLife continued its work to achieve a more sustainable and pollinator-friendly agricultural system in Europe. We established our position on the CAP's future in 2019, as reflected in the report A CAP for Pollinators [8]. This year, we solidified our work and continued our efforts to make a compelling case to improve environmental conditions for the future of pollinators. Although the timeline was disturbed by the COVID-19 sanitary crisis, we still brought our position to key actors such as Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), officers of the European Commission, and permanent national representations in Brussels. Negotiations on the final legislation to rule the future CAP were delayed, particularly during Belgium's first lockdown (March to June 2020). However, they resumed after the summer break.

**"Although the timeline was disturbed by the COVID-19 sanitary crisis, we still brought our position to key actors such as Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), officers of the European Commission, and representatives of permanent national representations in Brussels."**

Besides some one-on-one discussions with MEPs and other officials, we also created some new content summarising and better situating some of our proposals for good synergies between the CAP and protecting pollinators. We drafted and distributed two key documents: factsheets on two of our most innovative and ambitious tools to benefit pollinators in the CAP. Both factsheets were part of an advocacy campaign with MEPs of the European Parliament Committee on Agricultural and Rural Development as a primary audience, as well as permanent representations of Member States.

The first factsheet summarises our proposal for a Pollinator Index [9], an impact indicator for EU policies, including but not limited to the CAP. It provides an overview of the Pollinator Index's possibilities, particularly the parameters it measures and the information it provides. The European Commission is already working on a pollinator index, but we request that legislators include it in the final text to ensure its place in measuring policies' impact.

The second factsheet features the Pollinator Eco-Scheme [10]. As voluntary measures to stimulate specific ecological practices, eco-schemes [11] are becoming a significant green element of the CAP. We propose that authorities craft a pollinator eco-scheme and ensure an efficient application with a fair and attractive economic stimulus. Our goal is to improve the CAP and ensure that European institutions safeguard coherence among different policies and initiatives. Considering the ambitious EU Green Deal [12] and the Farm 2 Fork [13] and Biodiversity Strategies, [14] the CAP will require adequate measures to ensure it provides benefits, not harms.

**Pollinator ECO-SCHEME**  
Sep 2020

The new CAP will need to address the challenges related to the decline of pollinators in Europe

Public funds need to support basic ecosystem services and improve agro-environmental conditions

The EU Green Deal and its strategies require effective policies to achieve a real and just green transition

**KEY PROPOSALS**

**EXPECTED RESULTS**

**COMPULSORY MEASURES**

- A farmer includes one or more crops interesting to pollinators in at least 10% of his/her agricultural surface every year, possibly looking for prolonged flowering along the year.
- Choose crop varieties with proven nectar and pollen production. Or, habitat for pollinators: possibility to develop a new BEE-FRIENDLY PLANT BREEDING certification (meliferous potential).
- Diversify the crop varieties planted in field (at least 3 varieties).
- Presence of landscape features in the farm of min. 7%.
- No preventive use of pesticides (incl. seed and soil treatment) and in case of need, use of non-persistent pesticides (DT50 lower than 15 days).
- If pesticides treatment needs to be applied (proved IPM approach), apply only after sundown (when flying activity of pollinators is reduced) for all pesticides (including herbicides and fungicides).
- At least 10 hours/year education for farmers on pollinators.
- One-to-one beekeeper - farmer / naturalist - farmer engagement.

**OPTIONAL MEASURES**

- Crop rotation (GAEC 8) as 4-7 years.

BeeLife proposes farmers and beekeepers/naturalists to receive appropriate incentives if they fulfil the criteria described above.

Member States should be enabled to establish the Pollinator Eco-Scheme as a pluriannual contract in their strategic plans.

**Pollinator Index**  
Sep 2020

**CONTEXT**

European citizens increasingly request to improve how we monitor the impact and efficiency of policies that affect the environment and landscape. For this reason, BeeLife proposes to introduce a Pollinator Index as an impact indicator within the EU policies, including but not limited to the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

Pollinators, not only bees but other species as well, are essential allies to maintain a sustainable and productive food production system as well as resilient ecosystems. The European Court of Auditors denounced the inefficiency of public policies aiming to protect pollinators [1] and improving overall environmental conditions and biodiversity in agricultural landscapes [2]. There is an increasing need for more targeted measurements and an effective implementation of existing policies to accomplish real improvements in the field, such as the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive [3], which promotes beneficial measures (e.g. Integrated Pest Management).

The Pollinator Index has the potential to help to improve accountability, monitoring the effectiveness of public spending, and indicating when modifications are necessary.

**The Pollinator Index: Parameters and provided information**

Provided information	Parameters				
	Pollinator abundance and richness in agricultural landscapes	Rate of Winter/Summer Honey bee colony losses	Botanical richness of bee collected matrices	Pesticide abundance and richness in bee collected matrices (Bee sample their surroundings)	Amount of honeybee colonies per km2
Identification of favourable/unfavourable landscapes for pollinators	✓				✓
Efficiency of policies aiming at improving bee health both within and beyond the CAP (multiplying food resources, improving habitats, decreasing pesticide use)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pollination potential	✓	✓	✓		✓
Meliferous richness of a certain area along the year (availability of nutritional resources linked to climatic and environmental conditions)			✓		
Pollution in areas where landscape or agricultural policies have a direct or indirect effect versus the indicator of the intensity of pesticide use and, possibly, the approval of illegal uses				✓	✓

Factsheets published in September 2020, with translations available and used for advocacy activities

Thanks to members' collaboration, the factsheets were translated into several languages, and we now count with versions in English, French, Spanish, Italian, Romanian, and German. The multilingual versions [15] have been valuable for advocacy activities with permanent representations and discussions of some of our members at the national and regional levels. Some other local organisations and authorities have taken an interest in these proposals and have approached BeeLife to ask about their possible implementation, particularly in Wallonia (Belgium) and Italy.

Throughout the year, BeeLife participated in the Civil Dialogue Groups (CDGs) organised by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development. There is a series of different specific subjects for the meetings. We highlight our participation in the sessions on honey and beekeeping products, arable crops, cattle management, and stock-taking (about the organisation and rules of CDGs). Meeting notes and presentations are always available to our members in the Members' cloud storage.

In the final months of 2020, European institutions entered into a new stage for CAP's negotiations. BeeLife continued to follow the ongoing dialogues between the European Parliament, the Commission, and the council (trilogues). However, this stage is more restricted, and discussions with external parties are more limited. BeeLife joined efforts with other NGOs to denounce the lack of transparency [16] and participated in the translation and publication of a short article by CONAPI, explaining the current dialogues [17].

## PESTICIDE REGULATION AND RISK ASSESSMENT

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A significant amount of work that BeeLife conducts is the follow-up and advocacy regarding European regulation and risk assessment on pesticides, particularly those affecting bees and other pollinators. There are several dimensions to pesticides in Europe, and priorities vary depending on ongoing legislative developments and active substances evaluation by regulatory authorities.

The 2013 European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) Bee Guidance Document [18] on the risk assessment of plant protection products on bees continued to be a critical subject in 2020. The Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed (SCOPAFF) [19] discussed its possible implementation after seven years of delays and, more specifically, they addressed the potential definition of Specific Protection Goals (SPGs). By request of Member States, EFSA provided the committee with four different approaches to establish Specific Protection Goals to set the threshold of acceptance for pesticides' effects on the environment and non-targeted species. BeeLife reviewed and commented on the proposals, communicating them to EFSA and SCOPAFF members, emphasising its risks and advantages. However, we also insisted and denounced the disadvantages of the continuous political blockage that has delayed the adoption of EFSA's Bee Guidance Document [20]. BeeLife efforts on this matter have required joint technical work on assessing and evaluating the proposals, as well as advocacy and public relations activities.

Another issue we covered in 2020 was the risks that some veterinary products pose on bees. Based on the 2018 UNAF report *How Pesticides Used in Livestock Threaten Bees* [21], we conducted a tripartite work thanks to a collaboration with Karine Mahefarisoa, an intern from the Catholic University of Louvain. First, we created a short campaign to sensibilise relevant stakeholders on the subject, including a promotional video [22] and short presentations. Second, we conducted a Delphi survey study with different stakeholders, including European Institutions, national authorities and non-governmental agencies. In the end, we summarised and presented the findings in an academic paper in collaboration with other authors [23]. The paper has already been submitted and accepted, and it will be published in 2021 in the *One Health Journal*.

As in previous years, neonicotinoids also have been a significant challenge. In 2020, BeeLife paid particular attention to possible solutions to continuous emergency authorisations of banned neonicotinoids. With participants to the General Assembly, we organised a meeting with Client Earth to explore potential legal resources to tackle this situation. The conclusions lead to believe that the most effective measures would need to be at a national level, instead of European. Furthermore, we paid particular attention to Romania's case [24], which continues to surprise its long-lasting and succeeding emergency authorisations, and France [25], which took a significant setback in its environmental and biodiversity legislation by introducing emergency authorisations of neonicotinoids.

Finally, we underline BeeLife's participation in the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) Risk assessment of Biocides on bees and pollinators. ECHA invited us to participate as an expert stakeholder regarding future chemical products' evaluations, required before they enter the European market.

### Key subjects for 2020 included:

- **Adoption of EFSA'S 2013 Bee Guidance Document**
- **Establishment of Specific Protection Goals**
- **Pesticides Used in Livestock**
- **Emergency Authorisations of Banned Neonicotinoids**

## THE BEE HUB



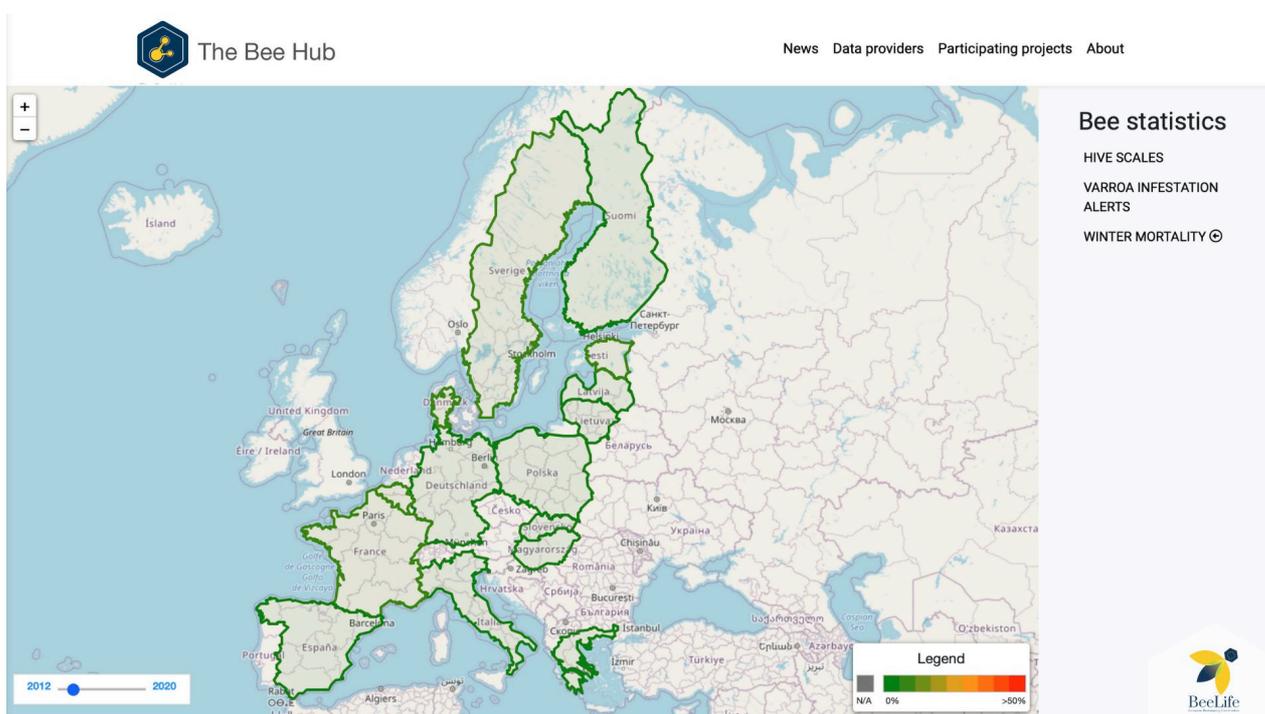
The Bee Hub

As a partner in the EU-funded Internet of Bees (IoBee) project, we decided to push our efforts and participate in the innovation market to protect pollinators. Since 2019, we followed a new path to create a never-before-seen platform that centralises, aggregates and communicates data relevant to pollinators: The Bee Hub. During the first semester of 2020, in the IoBee project framework, we achieved a Proof of Concept of The Bee Hub [26]. The Proof of Concept is an initial stage of the online tool that aggregates and visualises three datasets on bee health coming from different sources. We successfully launched the proof of concept, integrating data from digital monitoring systems in Wallonia (CARI) [27], historical data on bee mortality (COLOSS) [28], and varroa detection (Biene Österreich) [29].

The development of the Bee Hub was supported by administrative, engagement, and communications activities. As a result, the Bee Hub drew more attention, and new contacts were made possible, creating more opportunities to continue developing the platform and reaching out to new potential data providers to expand its reach and functions capability.

The Bee Hub is an open-source and collaborative tool. The code for the proof of concept is currently available on the GitLab repository [30], open to the public. However, we must note that agreements to share data remain exclusive to BeeLife as developer and manager of the online platform. Only BeeLife has access to the raw data and is free to use it according to the agreements reached with data providers, in compliance with data ownership and privacy protection.

In the second semester of 2020, we drafted a new project based on The Bee Hub to apply for funding with two partners, Zip Solutions [31], a Slovenian firm for IT and web development technology, and Visual Life, an Austrian firm owned by Biene Österreich's liaison with BeeLife and bee data expert, Michael Rubinnig. We finished a project to request Horizon 2020 funds in the Fast-Track to Innovation category [32]. We submitted the draft in October 2020, but it was not successful. The next steps in 2021 include reviewing and re-submitting the project and accommodating it for other types of calls.



The Bee Hub Platform: [www.bee-hub.org](http://www.bee-hub.org)

## EU BEE PARTNERSHIP PLATFORM



BeeLife has approached the EU Bee Partnership [33] in parallel to The Bee Hub developments to obtain further support and promote collaborations with the stakeholder group focused on bee health data. The EU Bee Partnership counts with a varied set of stakeholders and observers including Apimondia, the European Professional Beekeepers Association, European Federation of Honey Packers and Distributors, Pesticide Action Network, International Biocontrol Manufacturers Association, European Crop Protection Association, Association for Veterinary Consultants, COLOSS, EU Reference Laboratory for Bee Health, and more. BeeLife is a registered stakeholder and brought the Bee Hub's Proof of Concept developments to the table during the 6th EUBP Discussion Meeting during the first semester of 2020. Following negotiations, the European Food Safety Authority opened a procurement contract to develop a centralising platform on Bee Health. BeeLife applied to this contract call, proving to have the monopoly on its development and won an eight-month contract to further develop The Bee Hub, from a Proof of Concept stage to a Prototype one. The contract was then extended by 4 months and will conclude in June 2021.

The Bee Hub's further developments within this contract took the name of the EU Bee Partnership Prototype Platform on Bee Health (EUBPPP) [34]. We integrate new datasets into the platform and create new collaborations, partnerships and synergies, such as with the MUST-B project [35] (developing a holistic approach for the Risk Assessment on Multiple Stressors in Bees). Under this new provisional name, BeeLife is leading the development of the EUBPPP with the following objectives:

- Integrate new data sources (moving from 3 data sources from the Proof of Concept to at least 6 in the prototype).
- Stabilise algorithms to process data.
- Improve visualisation
- Conduct engagement and dissemination activities (signing new data provider agreements, produce a promotional and tutorial video of the platform)

The procurement contract NP/EFSA/SCER/2020/01 with EFSA kicked-off in June 2020 and will end in February 2021. A potential extension of four months is under review with EFSA and other EU Bee Partnership representatives. BeeLife continues to explore funding possibilities to continue the work on the EUBPPP and The Bee Hub.

**After negotiations and discussions with the EU Bee Partnership, the European Food Safety Authority opened a call to develop a centralising platform on Bee Health. BeeLife responded to this contract call, proving to have the monopoly on its development and won an eight-month contract, extended by 4 months, until June 2021.**



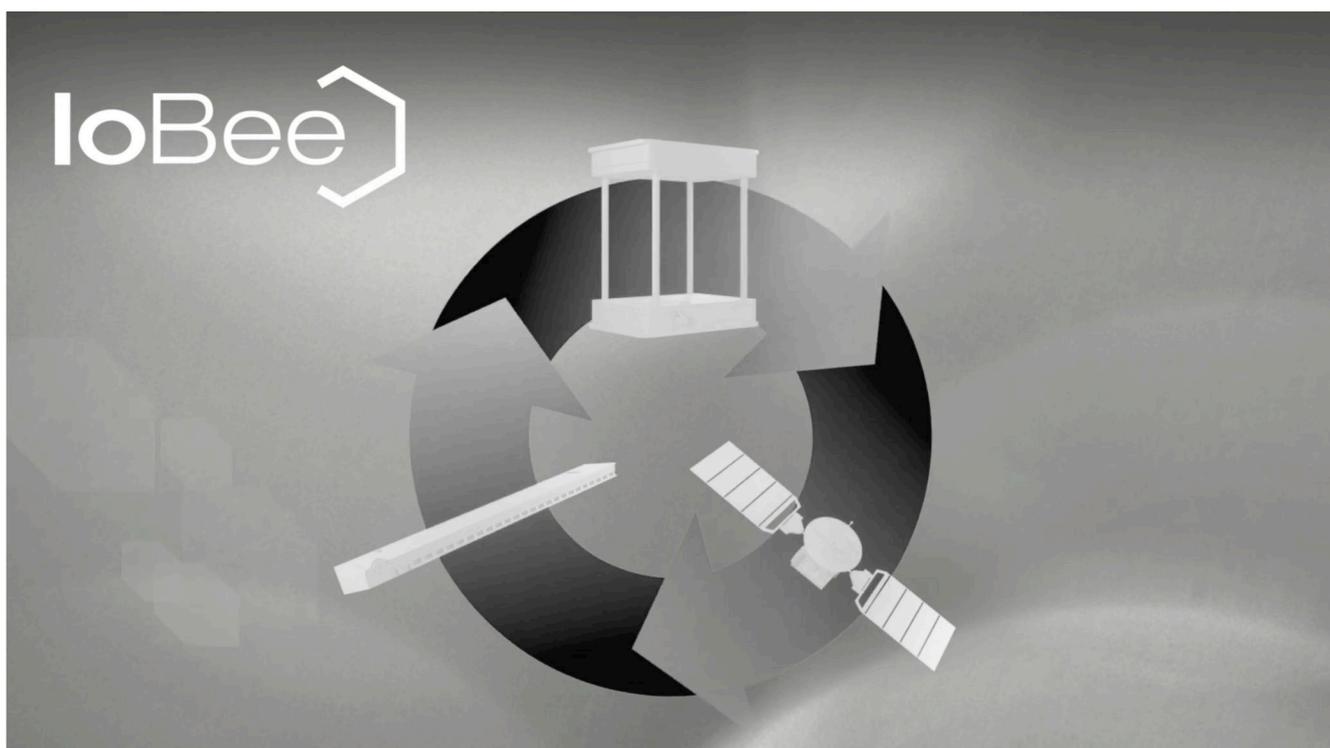
## THE INTERNET OF BEES **IoBee**

The Internet of Bees Project (IoBee) [36] was still ongoing during the first semester of 2020, formally finalising in August 2020. BeeLife's activities continued particularly in its leading roles for communications and dissemination, plus demonstration and testing. Although COVID-19 slowed the pace of some general activities, we were able to finalise planned activities. The consortium as a whole obtained a positive evaluation from reviewers of the European Commission.

From January until June, we finalised conducting activities for communications and dissemination, including managing and updating website content, producing and distributing press releases and producing a final video for the project's achievements. We were supposed to represent the consortium in the International Congress of Entomology, but organisers postponed the event due to the sanitary crisis.

Additionally, we continued our work for field tests of digital beehive monitoring systems, as well as an optoelectronic sensor for pollinator abundance and diversity. This work was not interrupted, and we were able to gather sufficient feedback from participant beekeepers from our network to report back to other consortium partners.

In the final months of the project, the reporting period started. Provisional reports required no revision and the final report assembled by project leader Irideon was admitted and approved by reviewers without corrections needed. The project concluded formally in August 2020.



Screenshot IoBee final project video

## OTHER ACTIVITIES

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- Following the court case in the Court of Justice of the European Union between the European Commission and Bayer [37].
- Supporting and disseminating the Save Bees and Farmers Europeans Citizens Initiative.
- Supporting the freedom of speech campaign challenging the SLAPP lawsuit against a journalist and environmental campaigners in the South Tyrol region (Italy) [38].
- Disseminating and commenting on the European Court of Auditors Special Report on the Protection of Pollinators in the EU [39].
- Active participation and dissemination of joint initiatives among the CAPNGO network, a collective of NGOs working for the CAP's future.
- Participating in the Farmers for The Future Initiative #Farmers2040. The project was conducted in close collaboration between the European Commission Joint Research Centre (JRC) and the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI) [40].
- Promoting BeeLife activities and campaigning on special occasions such as in the World Bee Day.

## OUR SUPPORTERS

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BeeLife is primarily funded by membership fees. Besides, we participate in projects and work in fundraising via donations.

We thank the additional support provided by

- Piamonte Miele [41]
- State Street Global Advisor [42]
- Armbruster Imkerschule [43]
- Individual donors via our website

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