

Slovenia – home of outstanding beekeepers



Slovenians Are Beekeepers with Heart and Soul

Slovenians are a nation of beekeepers, which can be felt at every step. We know our Carniolan bee well, its role in nature, and we appreciate the bee products of Slovenian beekeepers.

Slovenian beekeeping is special in many respects. We have our Carniolan bee, whose country of origin is Slovenia, we have our unique AŽ hive, we have bee houses, decorative beehive panels, we bake gingerbread cookies, make honey bread products, things you cannot find anywhere else. Most importantly, Slovenian beekeepers are beekeepers with heart and soul and for us beekeeping is simply something MORE.

Slovenian beekeepers are renowned across the world for our hospitality and openness. Beekeepers are happy to show our beekeeping farms, serve bee products, and talk about

beekeeping in general. This is why we have recently started developing apitourism, as we wish to present our activity to both fellow Slovenian and international beekeepers and the national and international public.

The laws that apply in honeybee colonies could serve as an example for us all. Respect, dedication and responsibility towards own and communal tasks are the basis for their survival. They are also the foundation for the survival of nature. The sooner people also realise this, the greater the possibility to save our world. Dear visitors, your visit to apitourism farms will lead you to a world of unforgettable experience!

Boštjan Noč, President of the
Slovenian Beekeepers' Association



Slovenia is a country in the heart of Central Europe, famous for its incredible landscape diversity as it is the crossroads of four major natural units: the Alps, the Dinaric Alps, the Pannonian Basin and the Mediterranean. The diversity of rocks, reliefs and the atmosphere also determines the incredible soil and biotic diversity. In this small country with pristine nature, in a country where we can admire mighty mountains, lush green forests that cover 60 percent of the total surface, clean rivers and lakes, blossoming meadows and the underground world of numerous caves, the sea and so much more, there hides a true treasury of flora and fauna. Despite Slovenia being a small country, it offers favourable conditions for beekeeping, as the diversity of plants enables the production of various types of honey. Slovenians are emotionally attached to bees. The old saying that beekeeping is

the poetry of agriculture was first used by the residents of the Slovenian lands. In addition, a recent slogan says that to be Slovenian is to be a beekeeper. Among every thousand citizens of Slovenia, four people are beekeepers, which is unique in the world. Slovenia has an over 140-year-old national beekeepers' association, the prominent technical magazine Slovenian Beekeeper (Slovenski čebelar) of a similar age, a beautiful beekeeping centre at Brdo pri Lukovici, more than 150 beekeeping banners, beekeeping formalwear, a hymn and much more. Slovenian beekeepers, who are mostly united in the Slovenian Beekeepers' Association, are proud to continue and to preserve the tradition of their ancestors. They take special care in the conservation of the autochthonous Carniolan bee, the protection of its life habitat and the production of the finest bee products.

You are most welcome to visit us. We will be glad to open the doors of our beekeeping premises. You will find out more about the mysterious life of bees, the life and the work of some of the best known Slovenian beekeepers, bee products and many other things.







The Carniolan Bee

The Slovenian territory is the original territory of the Carniolan bee – *Apis mellifera carnica*, Pollmann 1879. Its thorax is covered in brownish grey hair, and the rings on its abdomen are dark with light spots on the first and the second ring. A modest consumption of winter food supplies is typical of the Carniolan bee, as it spends the winter in smaller communities. Its spring development is incredibly lively though, as the family develops fast enough to be able to exploit the nectar. If the amount of nectar is low in nature, the Carniolan bee adapts by decreasing the number of eggs laid. Another fea-

ture of the Carniolan bee is the greater ability of orientation. It is also a good honeycomb builder and famous for its intense propolis production. In modern beekeeping, the tendency to swarm is not desirable; however, this particular species is more prone to it. This shows in longer swarming seasons and in a larger number of swarms during the season. Another special advantage of the “grey bee” is its calmness.

The Carniolan bee is one of the protected species in Slovenia. Beekeepers are not allowed to bring in any other bee species.



How We Organise Ourselves?

In 1873 the Carniolan Association for Prudent Beekeeping was established in Ljubljana, which represents the beginning of the organisation of the Slovenian beekeepers. Since 1898, we have been publishing the technical magazine Slovenian Beekeeper (Slovenski čebelar).

Today the beekeeping organisation is known as the Slovenian Beekeeper's Association. It includes 207 beekeeping societies and 14 regional beekeeping associations, with a total of about 7,500 beekeepers. Its main

tasks include the education and training of beekeepers in the framework of lifelong learning, publishing the Slovenian Beekeeper monthly and various technical books, the preparation of exhibitions, discussions and symposiums, the organisation of school clubs, beekeeping camps and workshops, raising the public awareness about the importance of bees in the preservation of the environment, the promotion of bee products in healthy nutrition and the list goes on and on.



Beekeeping and Cultural Heritage



Slovenia is world famous as an incredible beekeeping land that contributes greatly to global beekeeping. Beekeepers Anton Janša (1734–1773), Peter Pavel Glavar (1721–1784), Anton Žnid-eršič (1874–1947) and others contributed significantly to the world’s treasury of beekeeping knowledge.



Bee Houses

A bee house is a building or a place in which we put beehives under a common roof. In beekeeping with stacked beehives, the bee house has become indispensable.

The most suitable form of bee house is a wooden agricultural building. Wood is the most suitable material to provide the best living conditions for bees. Wood enables a relatively simple and cheap prefabricated and mobile construction, because sometimes one may need to move the bee house. The

wooden bee house suits most Slovenian settlements and landscapes best, both materially and visually. Only in the Karst and the Slovenian Littoral area is it partially substituted by stone. The bee house does not merely represent a residence for bees, but also the place for the beekeeper's work. Often, we can find a bed in bee houses, intended for the beekeeper. Nowadays, many have used the favourable microclimate of the bee house for the implementation of apitherapy.

Kranjiči (Traditional Carniolan Beehives)

The Kranjič is a low, wooden beehive with fixed combs. Such beehives used to be put tightly together into some form of a stack, in several rows. The traditional way of combining such beehives, which enabled the adaptation of the beehive space to the development of the bee colony, marks the beginning of box hive beekeeping.



Beehive Panel

The beehive panel is a painted wooden board that closes the kranjič beehive at the front and is a Slovenian beekeeping speciality. The first painted panels appeared in the second half of the 18th century. In the 19th century,

the art of panel painting spread widely across the Slovenian lands before slowly dying down at the beginning of the 20th century, as beekeeping in traditional Carniolan beehives was abandoned.





AŽ Beehives

Nowadays, the idyllic kranjič will not be found in Slovenian bee houses, as the modern leaf hives prevail, known as “žnideršiči” or AŽ-hives in short. It has been approximately one hundred years since this beehive was invented and offered to Slovenian beekeepers by the merchant, powerful landowner, industrialist and major beekeeper Anton Žnideršič from Ilirska Bistrica. The

new beehive quickly became popular due to its practicality and soon spread across all the Slovenian regions, then across the neighbouring Croatia. It remains the best beehive for transporting and is particularly suitable for older beekeepers, women and even for the handicapped, and is therefore also very popular abroad.





Bee products

Bee products are completely natural foodstuffs and a direct gift of nature (bees). With their pollination, these insects assist the preservation of biological balance, enable the existence of various animal and plant species and of course the existence of humans. In addition to that, they provide bee products, which are suitable for human consumption due to the increasingly faster way of modern life. The best known bee product is honey. However, bees also give us pollen, propolis, royal jelly and beeswax. Even

their poison is beneficial to people in many ways.

Natural conditions in Slovenia enable beekeepers to produce different honey types. By taking good beekeeping practices into account, a beekeeper can produce and keep a quality and safe honey the way it was produced by bees. In Slovenia there is ecological honey and three protected geographical designations of honey, i.e. Slovenian honey with protected geographical indication, Kočevje forest honey and Karst honey.



Production of Honey Pastries and Candles

The production of honey pastries and candle making are over 1,300-year-old crafts. For centuries, honey dough has been used as a unique creative material in the framework of the specialised handicraft activity known as honey-bread baking. Honey-bread baking is also known as "lectarstvo" in the Slovenian language. It was named after the characteristic decorative honey-bread pastry called the lect or lectec. It is a semi-durable pastry in the shape of tiles or various types of figures, which are either ornamental or resemble different objects. The honey dough is usually kneaded with rye flour, many times with the addition of different spices. Gingerbread that has been pressed into the wood-

en moulds, is known as Loka honey-bread (loški mali kruhek), while the hand-decorated variation of gingerbread is called Dražgoše honey-bread (dražgoški kruhek).

Alongside honey-bread baking, candle making was common due to the fact that after the third pressing of honey from the honeycomb, "lectars" were only left with beeswax, which had to be processed. They used candles to illuminate castle, monastery and church rooms. Candle makers poured wax into moulds to create votive figurines, which were bought by the rural population in good faith that they would help them obtain health and luck.



The Ministry of Health warns: Excessive consumption of alcohol is harmful to your health!

Honey-based Beverages

The basic raw material for all honey-based beverages is high-quality honey. The aroma of the beverage depends on the botanical origin of the honey, i.e. where the bees gathered the nectar or honeydew. Slovenia is one of the richest biotic areas in Europe and we therefore produce honey with a rich aroma and a wide variety of tastes. Floral, wild, lime, or chestnut honey are usually used for honey-based beverages. The lighter or darker colour of the beverage also depends on the type of the honey.

Honey-based beverages can be non-alcoholic (honey-based beverage in the form of juice concentrate or juice) or alcoholic beverages (mead, honey spirit, honey liqueur, honey beer, and sparkling mead). A true pride of Slovenian beekeepers is sparkling mead, which was first presented in 2005. It is made following the traditional (champagne) method from various types of honey. One of the oldest alcoholic beverages is mead, which is created by fermenting a honey solution (water and honey).



Beekeeping and the Young

People of various ages and professions are involved in beekeeping. Most of them pursue it as a hobby with a small number of beehives. For them, beekeeping is a way to spend their free time. In the company of their winged friends, they learn how to think and to observe. Together they rejoice at the plentiful honey harvest and share sympathies when a disease appears in the bee house.

In Slovenia, young beekeepers are being trained with the help of school beekeeping clubs, in which students find out about beekeeping. Beekeeping clubs are active in more than 200 primary schools in Slovenia.

If out of every ten students who attended the theoretical and practical lessons on beekeeping, at least two become beekeepers when they finish primary school, the club has served its purpose.

On the third Friday of November each year, Slovenian beekeepers organise an educational and promotional campaign for preschool and school children simply called the Honey Breakfast. The idea for the educational-promotional campaign stems from the Slovenian Beekeepers' Association which now presents an initiative to establish the "European Honey Breakfast".



Pollination

Bee products, such as honey, pollen, beeswax, propolis, royal jelly and bee venom, are used as food and to preserve general health. These products are also important as a raw material, which is used to obtain certain nutritional and other industrial products. However, the value of bee products is much less than the benefits provided by pollination. It is only thanks to the bee as the pollinator that we are able to have a rich selection of fruit and other agricultural products in our

food supply and that there is a plant biodiversity in nature. Bees are also an important indicator of ecological status in nature.

The bee is the first to show environmental changes, as any major environmental interference can severely shake its population. We should not take the presence of bees in the environment for granted. We should deal with them wisely and be aware of the treasure we have on the sunny side of the Alps.



Apitourism

The Slovenian beekeepers are world-famous for their hospitality and openness. The beekeepers are glad to show off their tidy beekeeping premises, serve bee products and talk about beekeeping in general. And it is thanks to all of the above that we have been developing beekeeping tourism for more than ten years, because we wish to present our activity to our beekeeping colleagues from Slovenia and abroad, as well as to the home and foreign public.

Apitourism represents the development and promotion of green, ecological and sustainable tourism. With the emergence and development of apitourism, a completely new dimension of the concepts of tourism, travelling and holidays is being formed – and most importantly, their effects. Apitourism represents a key segment of the green economy and with it tour-

ist products based on innovation, distinctive advantage and a high added value. It includes environmental, societal, economic and climate aspects, i.e. all four foundations of sustainable tourism. These elements of sustainable development are the biggest competitive advantage. The basis for the successful development of apitourism is connecting beekeepers, providers of tourist products, tourist associations, local communities and the country, as well as the partnership approach in shaping the offer, positioning and marketing.

Slovenia is the first and currently the only country to introduce certification of apitourism providers. The certification is an extremely important element of the development of the beekeeping tourist offer, as it promotes quality and competitiveness.

World Bee Day

connects the world



World Bee Day

Beekeeping has a rich tradition and is very important in Slovenia. Alongside the bee products, particular emphasis has been given to the indispensable role of the honey bee in the pollination of entomophilous plants. With pollination, honey bees and other pollinators provide a third of the food in the world. Beekeeping enables employment and guarantees nutritional safety. In addition, it does not represent any burden for the environment.

The Carniolan bee (*Apis mellifera carnica*, Pollmann 1879) is a protected bee subspecies in Slovenia. Due to its excellent traits, it is the second most common bee subspecies in the world. The Slovenian Beekeeper's Association is one of the best organised national beekeeper's associations and is greatly respected and acknowledged by the entire world for preserving and protecting the Carniolan bee, for beekeeping "with its soul", and for ensuring that its bee products are high quality and safe.

On the basis of these facts, the Slovenian Beekeeper's Association addressed the initiative to the Government of the Republic of Slovenia to achieve the proclamation of May 20 (the birth date of Anton Janša) as World Bee Day by the United Nations.

Activities connected to promoting the initiative in Slovenia are carried out under the common slogan: **WORLD BEE DAY UNITES SLOVENIANS AND CONNECTS THE WORLD.**





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