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Review of *Following the Wild Bees: The Craft and Science of Bee Hunting* by Thomas D. Seeley

Katrina Klett

Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden, katrina.klett@elevatedhoneyco.com

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Following the Wild Bees: The Craft and Science of Bee Hunting. Thomas D. Seeley. 2016. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, USA. 184 pages. \$22.95 (hardcover). ISBN: 978-0-691-17026-8.

Since the media's coverage of the sudden losses of worker bee populations in many honeybee colonies during the winter of 2006-07 (a phenomenon that was later termed the Colony Collapse Disorder or CCD), there have been increasingly high levels of popular interest in bees and beekeeping in the United States. While a number of books have followed this wave of interest, *Following the Wild Bees: The Craft and Science of Bee Hunting* by Thomas Seeley is a fundamentally unique contribution to popular honeybee literature. The focus of the book is not on the current synergy of effects that are leading to the decline of honeybee health, which we are so accustomed to hearing and reading about. The book teaches readers how to track and enter into the world of the bees, without honey hunting as the motivating factor for doing so. Rather, bee hunting is presented as an activity to bring us closer to the lives of bees, that people have held in wonder since time immemorial.

The book is particularly prescient now, as there is an increasing decline in American engagement with nature. Seeley sends a call for stillness in a crowded and connected world. The book is written for a public audience and makes no assumptions about prior honeybee knowledge. Even the utmost beginner should have no trouble picking up the book and following along. It is primarily a how-to book. If the reader follows the directions, she will learn to hunt bees and find a new communion with nature along the way.

This short and highly readable guide to bee hunting is jammed full of beautiful photographs, illustrations, and anecdotes from the author's detailed notes that he has collected from years of bee hunting in upper New York State. The book is structured to give the reader a step-by-step guide to becoming a bee hunter. The end of each chapter contains a bit of the science behind the various phenomena the new bee hunter is experiencing. All of the science is carefully worded so that any layman can discover the underpinnings of bee behavior.

As a practical guide, the reader has all she needs to begin the hunt immediately (after reading Chapter 3 about the best times of year to begin bee hunting). Some of the supplies that the reader will need, such as a compass, are probably no longer in many homes. The photos of the equipment and bee trees are very useful for those who have trouble imagining precisely what the author is explaining in his writing.

In today's America, a large percentage of the public lives away from the outdoors, and some of the skills and know-how in tracking bees require some basic calculations and note taking. Seeley's greatest challenge as an author was to write this book so that the activity feels fun and not like a research project. At this he succeeds, framing bee hunting as part sport and part meditation. He offers something to everyone, and the reader is struck that this is a really *good* thing to be doing. It's an activity bringing us closer to Americans the likes of Thoreau, who we learn was a bee hunter and is quoted in the book.

Seeley clearly enjoys writing for a popular audience, and his warmly personal anecdotes help bring us along to the forest. While the reader may be confused by some of the more technical aspects of the hunt found in Chapters 5 and 6, the stories that the author shares serve as practice runs and by the time we arrive at the end of the book, we have inadvertently become well versed in the details of the bee hunt. His rich descriptions of the interior of the Arnot Forest in New York instill in the reader an excitement to get out and try. Sadly, the greatest suspension of belief that readers must engage in is not whether they too possess the cunning to become bee hunters, but that wild bee colonies might still exist in their own region of the United States.

Following the Wild Bees is a refreshing call back to the forest to mingle in the shadows of Thoreau and other early American naturalists. It is an ethical guide to rediscovering the natural wonders of bees and engaging with them for the joy of doing so. This would be a wonderful book to share with children or to read as a class.—*Katrina Klett, Co-founder, Elevated Honey Co., and Master of Science Candidate, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden, #21 Qing Song Street, Pan Long District, Kunming, Yunnan, China.*