Project Beetopia: Using sustainable beekeeping and honey harvest for community-driven development in the Peruvian Amazon

The Champlain College Apiary was established in 2013 in order to provide experiential learning opportunities for students and community members and to support the college’s commitment to sustainability. After a few successful years as a campus living laboratory, we expanded our reach to the Peruvian Amazon with the creation of Project Beetopia, the research, education, and service endeavor started by German Perilla, faculty member and director of George Mason University’s Honey Bee Initiative, and Kristin Wolf, faculty member and director of the Champlain College Apiary. The mission of this project is to use beekeeping to promote individual and community empowerment, entrepreneurship, and economic self-sufficiency, while preserving natural and cultural resources. The primary research undertaken by this project is to successfully domesticate and manage endemic, stingless bee colonies as a source of medicinal and marketable honey, creating supplemental income and skills for rainforest communities. Since 2015, we have organized an annual student trip to Peru, where we share beekeeping skills and knowledge and coordinate other community-driven initiatives that members identify. These beekeeping projects, both at home and abroad, offer an invaluable lesson about the connection between bees, humans, and the landscape, and the honey that they produce showcases the sustainable, innovative, and enterprising spirit of the communities in which they are housed.

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