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IN THIS ISSUE:

FEATURE STORY:

▶ **JOIN THE FAIR TRADE CELEBRATION IN SAIDOUN** [Page 1](#)

▶ **FIRST BATCH OF APPRENTICE BEEKEEPERS LAUNCHED** [Page 2](#)

LET'S FOCUS: ON BEES, WITH BEEKEEPER BASSAM [Pages 3-4](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS [Page 4](#)

LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS:

▶ **RECYCLING PROGRAM IN BATROUN SCHOOLS** [Page 5](#)

▶ **BIRD TALES: THE RED-BACKED SHRIKE** [Pages 5-6](#)

▶ **AN EASY RECIPE FOR HOMEMADE TABASCO SAUCE** [Page 6](#)

PHOTO OF THE MONTH [Page 7](#)

FEATURE STORY

JOIN THE CELEBRATION: SAIDOUN BECOMES A FAIR TRADE TOWN

We are really pleased to invite you to join us on **August 8, 2015** as the village of **Saidoun** (Jezzine caza - South Lebanon) takes its first step on its way to becoming a **Fair Trade Town**.

The day will feature local produce and crafts by the people of Saidoun and their friends, as well as a lunch, hike and other activities.

Food products will include mouneh items, such as jams, preserves, dried herbs and pickles, as well as cookies and sweets, fruit syrups and floral waters. And of course, our own *Hoda Khawand (Em Rabih)* and the women of the village will be serving an elaborate buffet lunch prepared under the supervision of Saidoun native and celebrity chef *Sleiman Khawand*.

Crafts will include handmade baskets, crochet items, ceramic jewelry, lavender bags and the embroidery and natural wool work of our friends in Maghdoucheh: the Dignity Project cooperative (Read more about Dignity in [L.E.T.S. Lebanon Issue #18](#)).

Free buses will be available from Beirut at 9:00 a.m., and will leave Saidoun at the end of the day around 6:00 p.m. To reserve your seat email us at: contact.soilslebanon@gmail.com

Facebook event: <http://facebook.com/events/1074860799192535/>

FAIR TRADE TOWNS IN LEBANON

The mission of Fair Trade Towns in Lebanon is to increase Fair Trade awareness by encouraging local producers and preserving the environment.

10 Lebanese towns have joined the Fair Trade network, which groups more than **1,700 towns worldwide** and aims at spreading the concept of Fair Trade: Ain Ebel in Bint Jbeil; Qleyaa in Marjeyoun; Abra in Saïda; Kfar Tibnit in Nabatiyeh; Baskinta in Metn; Albisariya in Saïda; Mhaydthel in Rashaya; Ferzol in Zahle; Menjez in Akkar; and Saidoun in Jezzine.



The poster for the Fair Trade Celebration in Saidoun features a grid of images and text. At the top, it says 'Saidoun' with a logo. Below that, it invites you to 'CELEBRATE FAIR TRADE' on Saturday August 8, 2015. The main text is in Arabic: 'تدعوكم إلى الإحتفال بالتجارة العادلة السبت ٨ آب ٢٠١٥'. The grid includes: 1. Jars of mouneh with caption 'Mouneh, Dry Herbs, Desserts, Syrups' and 'مونة، أعشاب، حلو، عصير'. 2. A woman at a table with various products. 3. Plates of food. 4. Baskets of crafts with caption 'Baskets, Crochet, Embroidery, Handcrafts' and 'سلات، كروشيه، تطريز، حرف يدوية'. 5. A chef with a buffet of food with caption 'Local Food and Buffet' and 'غذاء بلدي'. 6. A group of people hiking with caption 'Guided Hike' and 'نزهة'. 7. A box for 'Activities and more...' with 'نشاطات وأكثر...'. At the bottom, there are logos for the European Union, Fair Trade, Saidoun Municipality, OMSAR, SOILS, and the Dignity Project cooperative.



FEATURE STORY

FIRST ADVANCED BEEKEEPING WORKSHOP IN SAIDOUN

On **July 25-26, 2015**, **SOILS Permaculture Association Lebanon** organized its first Advanced Beekeeping Workshop in **Saidoun** (Jezzine caza) with our own *Bassam Khawand*.

This intensive workshop complements the introductory sessions we have been holding since 2013 in Saidoun, and targets participants who seriously wish to start managing their own beehives. **4 apprentice beekeepers** took part in this first edition: *Miriam Abouzahr, Alexis Baghdadi, Jihad Khawand* and *Mohammad Saleh*.

THE 4 SEASONS OF THE BEEHIVE- - - - -

Bassam took the participants through the entire "bee year" and its different phases. The work of each season in Lebanon is determined by climate and location.

In summary, the bee year starts in Spring when bees rush to collect nectar from new flowers. This is also the season of swarming where beehives are creating new colonies. Honey producers have to check for diseases and add layers to beehives for the new honey reserves. They also have to manage swarms and decide what to do with new colonies. For some beekeepers, this would be the time when they relocate their hives from the coast to the mountains - and in some cases when growers on the coast decide to spray pesticides, these beekeepers would have to act fast.

Summer is the harvest season where a beekeeper reaps the benefits of his attention to his bees' health and wellbeing. Honey is extracted and the frames are replaced as necessary. Beeswax left after the extraction is returned to the bees to save them energy in building new cells. The bees should have enough reserves left until the coming autumn bloom in preparation for the winter months.

In Autumn, beehives are treated for diseases since there is no longer any risk of contaminating honey (intended for human consumption). Before the harvest season, even natural treatments like garlic cloves for Varroa mites can affect the taste of honey, and in case beekeepers use chemical treatments, they risk causing serious harm to consumers. If a hive's honey reserves are too low, then beekeepers may choose to feed it additional honey from their harvest, or sugar water, or other supplements.

Finally in winter beekeepers need to take precautions to ensure their bees survive extreme temperatures. Beehives need to be protected from the elements: raised off the muddy ground, waterproofed, sheltered from the wind, south facing, etc. Some beekeepers pick this time to relocate their hives to the coast.

The 4 apprentice beekeepers accompanied Bassam to the fields where he keeps his beehives, and officially inaugurated the summer harvest period. They collected honey frames from beehives while keeping an eye out for potential problems in the hives. Back at "headquarters" (Bassam's "honey workroom"), they proceeded to extract the honey.

BEING A BEEKEEPER- - - - -

On the first day of the workshop, Bassam had warned the participants that there is no single right way of keeping bees. Different solutions might work for different beekeepers and their different purposes.

What his beekeeping practice boils down to is an amalgam of different methods he picked up from books, older beekeepers and his own experimenting.

According to him, it comes down to what works best for every different beekeeper: how much effort they want to spend, how much produce they want to harvest, and whether they want to take a natural or a chemical approach.

The workshop also included tips on how to buy, manage and maintain beehives. With hands-on practice activities.

The 4 participants are very excited about starting out with their own hives next year, and Bassam promised them all the help he can give.

Stay tuned for updates!



LET'S FOCUS

LIFE ON THE BEE TRACK - A CORRESPONDENCE WITH BEEKEEPER BASSAM KHAWAND

When was your love of bees born? Where did it stem from?

I have a passion for the land and for nature in general. I can't tell specifically where my love for bees, or my passion for keeping them comes from. I recall that this insect caught my attention very early as a child, and I have been watching it in its natural environment, on flowers and in the fields. I would watch bees in their beehives and watch beekeepers' attention to them. I'd say that accompanying my father when he worked in the fields nurtured this passion in me.

You left the city's bustle and artificiality to settle in your village, Saidoun, raise bees and start agricultural and development projects. Tell us how you reached that decision.

I left the city for several reasons, the most important of which was that I wanted to be back in my hometown which I love, and I wanted to try to help my fellow "Saidounites", even with a minimal contribution. I also wanted to be near the land and the bees, and change the lifestyle I had become used to when I was an employee. Now, as a farmer, I have a light schedule mostly, and I enjoy a lot of free days during which I can participate in different events and occasions. This is the way our grandparents used to live; in the winter, for example, they would not leave the house, and so they used that time to look after themselves and the people around them.

How did you build confidence in your abilities, your land and your bees to reach financial stability?

I put a lot of time and preparation in leaving my job and the city, and it took me nine years before I could start my own sustainable occupation in the countryside. In that period, I read a lot of books on agriculture and deepened my knowledge of beekeeping. I spent a full trial year between the city and the village, during which I tried my hand at raising chickens and quails, planting crops, producing olive oil, etc. In the end, I chose beekeeping as my main occupation. [...]The benefits of farming can only be understood by someone who plants with their own hands. There are numerous benefits to touching and feeling the soil. I only enjoy eating what I grow or what my friends have grown. When I lived in the city, I would grow on my balcony using soil from Saidoun. I advise everybody to try and grow something because the soil has a lot to teach us. As for bees, I like to compare the beehive to a tree full of benefits. Farming requires sufficient space and labor to be a fully life-supporting and sustainable occupation. This is why I picked beekeeping, which seemed easier for me. [...] Passion, commitment and determination are the most important prerequisites for success. Everything else revolves around those. I have put down a schedule for myself, and I try to abide by it. But I also set aside a lot of time for rest, because it is an important part of sustaining one's work. However, being passionate about what I do makes me look forward to my working hours - which is the exact opposite case of when I used to be employed.

You did not inherit the beekeeping trade, but developed your own abilities instead. Tell us how you built up your knowledge.

As I said before, my love for bees started at a very early age. My love for honey probably helped too - in my family we would consume about 30 kgs a year. I used to keep up with the news of beekeepers in the village and I would stick around during their gatherings to glean what information I could. At the same time, I would read what books and magazines I could to learn more about beekeeping (and I still do that). I began to beg our neighbor who was a beekeeper to let me tag along when he visited his bees. Soon, he was waiting for me to accompany him and help him whenever I had a vacation or day off. Around that time, I also began following discussions on beekeeping on internet websites and forums. Today, I make sure I attend every single conference I am invited to, and I try to discuss bee diseases with those beekeepers who are more experienced than me. In the end, I have to say that reading has always been, and is still the main source of knowledge for me. [...] Reading is the foundation of my success. I never take a step before reading about a subject from several sources. Every meaningful change I implemented in my life started with a book.



Continued on Page 4

[▶ back to contents](#)



LET'S FOCUS

Continued from Page 3

Is beekeeping a hobby or a trade that we can learn from previous generations?

Beekeeping is an art. It can start out as a hobby like painting or music, but as soon as it becomes a source of food or income, creativity begins. Like any art, beekeeping can be learnt fairly easily - provided the desire to learn stems from love and passion. The learner needs to feel love for nature, and must also be willing to learn.

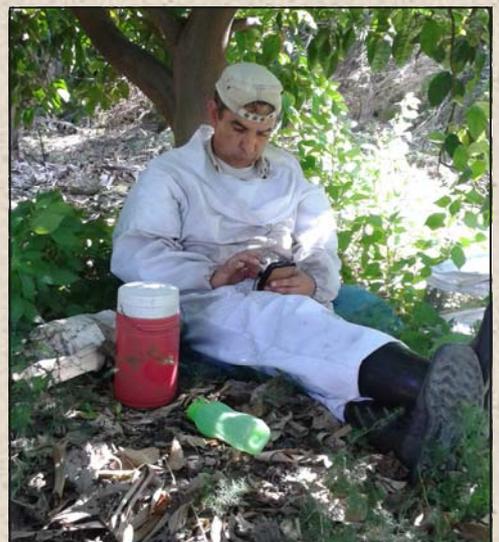
What sets you apart from other beekeepers?

There are 2 types of beekeepers: Those who love bees, and those who love honey. I belong in the first category. I try to learn from bees and understand what they need, not bend them to my will. In other words, bees in the wilderness are closer to nature and their "natural" state, which is something I am trying to apply more in the way I deal with bees. Honey produced under these circumstances is therefore the more natural and better product. You can tell real honey from manipulated honey simply by smelling and tasting it: The human body is quite capable of differentiating between natural and artificial flavors. For a scientific approach, laboratory tests would be required. There is a lot of talk about "impure" honey made by bees that have been fed sugar. Beekeepers may feed their bees sugar for one of 2 main reasons: either to supplement their food stores during winter, or to motivate the queen bee to lay more eggs before the honey season. I do not think any beekeepers feed their bees sugar to increase their harvest and sell "impure" honey - at least none in my circle.

How have bees changed you personally and in relationship to others and to nature?

Bees have had a profound impact on my life. They taught me that I should only make time for useful pursuits, and that living in a community is essential. More importantly, they taught me the sacred duty of respecting all living beings. We do what we can while we are able, and when we no longer can do it, life still goes on. Yet, I am still nowhere close to understanding life and its creation, even through bees. [...] Bees are my school. I learn from them and, just like them, I try to find solutions and adapt. Bees' primary concern is the wellbeing of the beehive; everything they do is geared towards that greater good. If a large number of bees suddenly die, the queen immediately lays more eggs, and if she herself dies, then another is raised to replace her, and life goes on. Bees do what they can with what they have, and they do it in the most appropriate way. This is how I try to live my life. I sincerely believe we humans will eventually give up our destructive ways - I can smell an environmental revolution on the horizon that will turn things around. [...] Bees can teach children the benefits of living in a community, as well as the distribution and importance of the role every member of that community plays. They teach them to recognize priorities - such as selecting the flowers with the most nectar - and that living the right way entails constant work, with no room for laziness. All elements of life come from nature and the soil, the soil we walk on holds all the ingredients for life. Respecting the soil, nature, bees and all life is the most important lesson to learn.

Shared by Amar Omri, translated/adapted by Alexis Baghdadi - The original Arabic version was published on: http://amaromri.blogspot.com/2015/06/blog-post_23.html?pref=fb



[▶ back to contents](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS

**"FAIR TRADE DAY IN SAIDOUN"
LOCAL CRAFTS AND PRODUCE MARKET**

Celebrate Fair Trade

AUGUST 8, 2015

11:00 a.m - 6:00 p.m.

Saidoun village, Jezzine caza

Fair Trade awareness and celebration.
FREE ENTRANCE + FREE BUS from Beirut.

<http://facebook.com/events/1074860799192535/>

**"IRSS AL MINA IN TYRE"
STREET FESTIVAL**



AUGUST 14-15, 2015

7:00 p.m. - midnight

Tyre (Sour) fishermen port

Traditional food and crafts, music, theater and performances.
FREE ENTRANCE

<https://www.facebook.com/events/1115065825187564/>

**"NEHNA WEL AMAR WEL JIRAN"
STREET FESTIVAL**



August 28-30, 2015

Different timings

Vendôme (Gears stairs) in Mar Mikhael street, Beirut

Dance, theater and puppet performances, street food, exhibitions.
FREE ENTRANCE

Stay tuned to this page for the program:
<https://www.facebook.com/kahraba.collectif>

[▶ back to contents](#)



LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

BATROUN RESIDENTS IMPLEMENT A RECYCLING PROGRAM IN LOCAL SCHOOLS

By the beginning of the next academic year, most schools in **Batroun** (North Lebanon) will have implemented **waste sorting and recycling programs!** That's right, **in 2016, 9 public and private schools** will have a recycling program, thanks to a few determined individuals.

Our friends *Maya Karkour* and her sister *Lamya*, both activists for environmental education and development, first joined up with *Tamar Hadechian* to raise awareness about recycling in schools. The 3 put together a play and a presentation about the social and environmental impact of littering, and the importance of recycling.

By chance, they heard about **Batroun Khallia A7la** (بترون خاليها أحلى - make Batroun more beautiful) a small group of residents who had initiated a cleaning campaign for some of the city's beaches the year before. These residents were very happy to come on board and took ownership of the newly started Batroun Schools Recycling program.

George Yaacoub and *Jennifer Abi Khattar* spearheaded the implementation of the program by actively using all their local contacts to arrange meetings with directors and teachers of schools in Batroun, and explain the program to them.

The Batroun Schools Recycling program obtained funds to create new customized recycling bins made of flex (a composite plastic) from old advertising banners by the Lebanese company **WASTE®**. To find out more about WASTE®, see [L.E.T.S. Lebanon Issue #16](#) or visit <http://www.waste-lb.com/>. Cardboard bins for inside use in each classroom in the participating schools were purchased from the NGO **T.E.R.R.E. Liban** (an advocate of sorting and recycling initiatives). The program involved 1.5 hour awareness sessions that comprise a play and a recycling game to raise awareness and ensure that children understood the importance of recycling and the 3 Rs, and how to properly use their new sorting bins.

Maya, Lamya, Tamar, George, Jennifer, and the members of Batroun Khallia A7la designed a full collection scheme. This involved a large collection point and container in one of the city's parking lots for the recycling collection trucks to come and pick up the recyclables once their volume justifies the cost of transportation and collection.

By the end of the academic year 2014-2015, a total of 7 schools were on board, including the Assafina Association for people with special needs. Next year hopefully, 2 more schools in Batroun are set to take part in the program (Sainte Famille and the Batroun International School), which would cover **all the city's schools**.

Starting next year, Batroun Khallia A7la hopes to further expand this initiative with the support of the city's municipality.

Reported by the Editorial Team



[▶ back to contents](#)

BIRD TALES: THE RED-BACKED SHRIKE IN MIDDLE EASTERN CULTURE AND ISLAM

The red-backed shrike (*Lanius collurio*) is a species of migratory passerine birds that flies over Lebanon in the spring and fall. It is not a game bird, and many consider its arrival as an indicator of the coming spring.

While female birds look alike in most shrike species, the males of this particular species have a reddish-brown color on their dorsal surface and wings. They also have bluish gray patches near the head area, behind the neck and at the tip of the tail.

Continued on Page 7



[▶ back to contents](#)



LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

Continued from Page 6

The red-backed shrike is carnivorous, and preys on birds, lizards, rodents and insects. It lives in plains and open woodlands, and hunts by perching and spotting its prey. Some people nickname it the "butcher bird" because of its practice of impaling corpses or parts of its food on thorns or barbed wire. The Prophet Muhammad, prohibited hunting the red-backed shrike because it preys on disease-carrying animals, and also removes waste (carrion).

Sadly it is often mistaken for a wheatear (*Oenanthe isabellina*) by inexperienced hunters who shoot it for its meat.

Shared by Fouad Itani, translated by Alexis Baghdadi

An Arabic version of this article was published on June 10, 2015, in Sayd Magazine's website: <http://www.sayd-magazine.com/?p=2384>

To see more photos of shrikes and birds, visit the page **Birds of Lebanon and the Middle East** <https://www.facebook.com/birdsoflebanon?fref=ts>



[▶ back to contents](#)

HAVE FUN MAKING YOUR OWN HOMEMADE TABASCO SAUCE

I like hot peppers, and **Tabasco** peppers happen to grow very well in my family's small garden in Beirut. I have been pickling my pepper harvest for the past few years, and last year I started exploring new ways of preserving them, starting with drying, and I promised myself I would make **hot sauce** this summer. And so I did.

McIlhenny's Tabasco pepper sauce is what I usually buy from the store. It's a pretty decent brand, and quite affordable. But since I started making more and buying less, I decided I would try to make this sauce myself - after all, there were only 3 ingredients on the bottle: **Tabasco peppers, vinegar** and **salt**.

I looked up a few recipes online and the list of ingredients was pretty consistent. Some recipes called for sugar and garlic too, but as a rule I prefer to steer clear of sugar. So this is the recipe I ended up adopting, it was really easy and quick:

INGREDIENTS

- 450 grams of fresh, de-stemmed red Tabasco peppers (I picked mine from my garden)
- 2 cups of white vinegar (read the ingredients, I found some brands used flavoring!)
- 2 tsps of salt (I used ground rock sea salt)

INSTRUCTIONS

Put the vinegar and peppers in a saucepan and heat them (you can use the peppers whole, but some recipes I found suggested chopping them first). Add the salt and mix well, then cover the mixture and let it simmer for 5 minutes.

When the mixture cools down, pour it into a blender and blend it until it looks like a puree. After that, strain and press the mixture well to get rid of the pulp, place the juice in a sterilized jar and refrigerate. After 2 weeks, strain the mixture and add some white vinegar to adjust the consistency if it is too thick.

Some recipes I found suggested refrigerating the entire mixture, then straining it after 2 weeks in the refrigerator. It shouldn't make any difference, so it is really up to you.

Shared by Alexis Baghdadi

See more photos and recipes on the SOILS blog page <http://www.soils-permaculture-lebanon.com/our-blog-articles-diy>



[▶ back to contents](#)



PHOTO OF THE MONTH

You sent us your submissions and you voted for your favorites. Here it is, the PHOTO OF THE MONTH:
To send us your photos, email us on contact.soilslebanon@gmail.com



Goat herd in Maydoun, Bekaa
Photo by Alexis Baghdadi

► [back to contents](#)

GET IN TOUCH, GET INVOLVED

Do you enjoy reading this newsletter?

Send us your feedback and suggestions, share your news, photos, tips or thoughts, or find out more.

Email us at: contact.soilslebanon@gmail.com

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A THOUGHT TO SHARE ...

**“Hope is the only bee
that makes honey with-
out flowers.”**



–Robert Green Ingersoll (1833-1899)

► [back to contents](#)

