This fall presents a unique opportunity to attend an Apimondia Congress in North America! From September 8 – 12, Apimondia, or the International Federation of Beekeeping Associations, is having its 46th Congress in Montréal, Quebec (https://www.apimondia2019.com/). After a few years of hard work by the organizing committee headed by Pierre Giovenazzo of Laval University, Rod Scarlett of the Canadian Honey Council, and Stephen Pernal of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, the opening of this distinguished event steadily approaches. This conference represents a one of a kind occasion to learn about current beekeeping research from around the world, meet a wide variety of industry representatives, and explore topics of interest in beekeeping from many different perspectives.

In recognition of the close relationship between pollinators and farming, the health and productivity concerns that these areas share and opportunities for knowledge transfer and collaboration, the theme of this year’s Congress is ‘Working together within agriculture, Canada’s answer to sustainable beekeeping’.

Attendees will be given a warm welcome in Montréal, a city known for its hospitality. The Congress is being held at the Palais des congrès de Montréal (https://congresmtl.com/en/), a beautiful convention and exhibition centre in the heart of the city with some of the city’s most popular sectors only steps away, including Chinatown, the business district, Old Montréal, and the Quartier des Spectacles, or the centre for Montréal’s cultural events and festivals. Within walking distance to the Palais des congrès are many hotels as well as restaurants; the culinary scene is part of what draws visitors to the city, which is known for its diverse and delicious food.

Montréal is a multicultural city, with almost 1/4 of the people who live there speaking at least 3 languages; altogether 100 languages are spoken in the city. Although the official language of the city is French, Montréal is the focal point of Quebec’s English speaking community, and a unique feature of Montréal among Canadian cities is the ability of many of its residents to speak both French and English.

The opening ceremony of the Congress will take place on the evening of Sunday, September 8 and it is open to all registrants coming from across the globe. Along with welcoming addresses from the organizing committee, Apimondia officials and representatives from the City of Montréal, a short film showcasing beekeeping across Canada will be presented. There will also be a show by The Jerry Cans, a Juno nominated band from Iqaluit, Nunavut whose music is a combination traditional Inuit throat singing and roots-rock, sung in the Indigenous language of Inuktitut. This will be an enjoyable evening for all attending.

Key areas of interest which will be covered at the Congress are based on the seven Apimondia Scientific Commissions related to apiculture: Beekeeping Economy, Bee Biology, Bee Health, Pollination and Bee Flora, Beekeeping Technology and Quality, Apitherapy, and Beekeeping for Rural Development. The four keynote speakers, well-known scientists and researchers in their fields, were chosen for how their individual work aligns with current concerns in beekeeping as well as for continuity with the seven Commissions.
Gene Robinson, a professor of Entomology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, is also director of the Carl R. Woese Institute for Genomic Biology, and director of the Bee Research Facility. His lab has been doing ground-breaking work developing large scale genomic resources to address questions around eusocial evolution in bees and wasps in an effort to understand the maintenance and elaboration of social life. Dr. Robinson’s keynote speech will focus on the evolution and mechanisms of social behaviour, and in related symposia following this keynote, current work in honey bee genomics, biology and semiochemicals will be covered.

Rufus Isaacs is an extension specialist in the Department of Entomology at Michigan State University whose team focuses on insect pest and pollinator management in farming. He has also been helping to guide the Michigan Pollinator Initiative which works in pursuit of research-based solutions for beekeepers, growers, land managers and policy makers to provide economic and ecological stability. Dr. Isaacs will deliver a keynote speech on Integrated Crop Pollination, an agricultural project in Michigan that investigates the performance, economics and farmer perceptions of different pollination strategies in various fruit and vegetable crops (icpbees.org). Related symposia following his talk will include honey bee and non-apis bee pollination, as well as pollination and flora with environmental change.

The work of Peter Rosenkranz has included research on the host-finding behaviour of Varroa destructor. His interest in honey bees comes from a scientific as well as a practical perspective, as Dr. Rosenkranz runs his own beekeeping business. He is the director of the Apicultural State Institute at the University of Hohenheim, and has also worked in applied research in bee pathology, extension work and honey bee breeding. His presentation, Worldwide Perspectives on Bee Health, will be followed by symposia which include breeding for mite and disease resistance, as well as issues concerning emerging diseases and pests which will be delivered by the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), the intergovernmental organization responsible for improving animal health worldwide.

The final keynote speaker will be Thomas Seeley, Horace White professor of Biology at Cornell University. He teaches animal behaviour and studies the behaviour, social life and ecology of honey bees. He is highly regarded among beekeepers for his popular books on honey bees which are indispensable texts for those interested in this field. He is also well known for his research on feral honey bee colonies, how they differ from managed colonies and how they are able to survive and adapt to pests and disease. Recognizing that honey bees have a long evolutionary history, he applies this perspective to beekeeping to account for their ability to adapt by way of natural selection, and calls this Darwinian Beekeeping. This the focus of his keynote speech, and a related symposium on natural and forest beekeeping will follow.

The seven commissions will be covered in a wide variety of symposia which take place throughout each of the four days, following these keynote presentations, and in one of the main conference rooms, the oral presentations will be translated into French and Spanish. Over 940 abstracts from scientists engaged in cutting-edge research from around the world are considered for inclusion in this year’s Congress. Some of these have been chosen for oral or poster presentations. The poster presentations will be located in an area easily accessible from the main conference rooms, and by many are considered to be the heart of the Congress, offering the opportunity for presenters and participants to interact. There are also several Round Table discussions being held concurrently with the symposia, offering participants to discuss current issues with visiting experts and scientists, as well as “cross-cutting” symposia, bringing two or more commissions together where areas of interest overlap.

The submitted abstracts have been rated by the seven Scientific Commission Presidents of Apimondia as well as the Canadian scientific program committee, which is comprised of 28 members from across Canada (many of whom are members of the Canadian Association of Professional Apiculturists or CAPA), and a few from the U.S. Leading this local scientific committee is Stephen Pernal, who has brought 25 years of experience in apicultural research into putting together an extensive scientific program which is representative of current research and popular areas of interest.
The local scientific committee includes sub-chairs, specialists in their fields, who have played key roles in rating abstracts for each of the seven scientific commissions. These include Gard Otis from the University of Guelph, in charge of Rural Development; Johan van den Heever, an analytical chemist with Alberta Agriculture and Forestry in Edmonton, Alberta, for Technology and Honey Quality; Shelley Hoover, Apiculture Specialist for the Alberta Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, for Pollination; Ernesto Guzman, Professor and Director of the Honey Bee Research Centre at the University of Guelph, in charge of Bee Health; Stephen Page of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada is working on Beekeeping Economy, Rob Currie at the University of Manitoba for Biology, and Stefan Stangaciu, President of the Romanian and German Apitherapy Societies, in charge of Apitherapy. As a group, the local scientific committee has brought a wide array of experience and knowledge to designing a high-quality scientific program to this year’s Congress.

The organizing team has placed more emphasis on the inclusion of workshops this year, most of which are being held in the evenings after the regular symposia, with a few being held concurrently. Some of the topics of these workshops and their presenters include: Honey Sensory Analysis with Raffaele Dall’Olio, Opportunities for Youth in Beekeeping with Dr. Robyn McCallum (sponsored by CAPA), Bees in the City: Biology, Regulations and Thinking Big with Dr. Andony Melathopoulos (sponsored by the Canadian Honey Council), and How to Create a Successful Beekeeping Development Project with Dr. Gard Otis (sponsored by VITA North America). These workshops are a unique focus at Apimondia 2019, an opportunity for learning in the atmosphere of a small group with recognized experts.

Another Canadian touch to this year’s Congress is a focus on successful beekeeping businesses from around the country from a diversity of operations and geographies. These will be presented in two separate symposia during the Congress, and will include an Alberta operation with thousands of colonies, Ontario honey packers, queen and nuclei producers, a focus on beekeeping in Atlantic Canada and a honey producer in Saskatchewan. There is also a focus on three Quebec beekeeping operations in the technical tours, through which participants can visit these successful businesses to discover their beekeeping traditions, expertise, and products.

The World Beekeeping Awards a global contest of all things related to beekeeping, and everyone is encouraged to enter! It is an opportunity to have your hive products brought together and judged with those from across the globe. Categories include honey, beeswax, meads and other honey beverages, cosmetics and medicines. There are contests for best innovations and inventions for beekeeping, and also for books and magazines. Honey quality is a theme of the conference, and as something new to this year’s Congress, all honeys which are brought to be evaluated as part of the World Honey Competition will be tested for authenticity using Nuclear Magnetic Resonance (NMR) spectroscopy. Honeys will also be tested for acidity, moisture and presence of antibiotics, among other qualities. Contest rules are posted on the Congress website under the “World Beekeeping Awards”. All honey classes that are required to be sent for laboratory analysis must be received by July 20, 2019.

Last but not least, there is the ApiEXPO – the biggest beekeeping trade show you’ll have the opportunity to visit. The current list of exhibitors, which is at over 200 and growing, includes manufacturers of beekeeping equipment and attire, companies specializing in bee nutrition and hive technology, bee hive product and stock producers, as well as educational institutions and beekeeping associations. From the latest innovations in hive components and bee health products, to current advances in hive monitoring from companies around the world, there will be something here for everyone, regardless of the size of your operation.

More information about this year’s Congress, including registration, schedules, travel details and hotel accommodation can be found at www.apimondia2019.com. The deadline for hotel registration is July 24, and the deadline for online registration for the Congress is July 31. We hope to see you there!

From the Canadian organizing team of Apimondia 2019

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