

Festival and the Beecab

Bridget Nicholls (Founder and Director of Festival), **Alistair Hadley** (Creative Director of Festival), **Pat Goodwin** (Head of Pathogens, Immunology and Population Health at the Wellcome Trust), **Robin Ince** (comedian) and **Steve J Benbow** (beekeeper) talk about Festival 2009, the Beecab and the collapse of bee colonies.

BN: The main reason we're all here – yes why are we here? [laughs] – this morning is the Beecab, and the Beecab we're launching early and this is going to go to schools throughout July and visit all the local schoolchildren and make them realise that bees in urban areas are very important.

AH: And we blacked out the windows, sort of *Pimp My Ride*-style, and made some wings for it. And then we went about and stuck fur all over it so it looked like a bee basically.

PG: People ask me why on Earth is the Wellcome Trust, which actually is a biomedical research charity, why on Earth is it interested in the health of pollinators and bees? If they disappeared there would be a big impact on the health of humans and animals and the world would look a very different place.

RI: Festival is another fantastic opportunity to get together a really disparate group of singers, dancers, a small orchestra, comedians and musicians and celebrate insects and celebrate the world of the bee and come up with ridiculous ideas which hopefully underneath it all afterwards people will even go 'I've got to buy more books about entomology, I must know more about Karl von Frisch and the waggledance'.

SJB: Within the taxi we'll have a little observation hide as well, we're looking at showing a series of little films in the back of the bee taxi at the Royal Festival Hall and to schoolchildren, again to show the plight of bees, how straightforward it is to keep bees.

BN: Festival is from the 3rd to the 6th of September, it kicks off at the London Zoological Society Meeting Rooms and on the 3rd of September there's going to be a symposium: 'How Insect are We?' And we've got Deborah Gordon who's kind of the new E O Wilson and she's going to be talking about insect societies and her studies of insect societies, and we've got John Gray the philosopher who wrote *Straw Dogs*, who is going to be talking about insects in human society and how they interlink, and we've also got Michael Pawlyn, who was one of the architects behind the Eden Project and he's based a lot of his designs on the studies of insects, so it's trying to show people and people start debating how insects are very useful in terms of biomimicry and forging new ideas in technology and medicine and all sorts of areas in human life and cultural life where insects are imperative.

RI: First of all it's going to be fantastically entertaining, I think the art installations that I've already heard about, the Beecab as well, all of these things are just idiosyncratic, they're different, they're one of those things which I think sometimes can be seen as being very British – to tackle entomological subjects in such a way – so I think they're going to be hugely entertained and I think they're going to come out of it as well and go 'I am somewhat wiser than I was before and may well change my existence slightly'.

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BN: And then it goes on to the South Bank Centre from the 4th to the 6th of September and it's just jam-packed with content, we've got Robin Hitchcock, Robin Ince doing comedy and music based around insects and we've got Chris Watson, the renowned – David Attenborough's *Life in the Undergrowth*, he did all of the sound recordings for that, and he was one of the founders of Cabaret Voltaire, and he's commissioned a choir to duet with live bees on the stage, so it's going to be pretty impressive. And we're turning the whole of the Queen Elizabeth Hall – the Queen Bee Hall, sorry – into Bee Social, where people can come and discuss colony collapse and meet beekeepers, learn how to keep bees, see how bees work in different ways in culture and in industry for humans.

RI: I think the best form of entertainment is where someone leaves and goes 'well I was laughing all the way through or clapping along or whatever it may be and now I know a little bit more about the fact that bees are in decline' and that the loss of bees is not just 'oh well there goes another little creature', it's a major knock-on effect for the whole world and it makes us I think look at lots of different species. Every year more and more species die and it's not just the death of one object, one thing, it's the death of part of an ecosystem and part of the whole chain of life.

BN: Urban societies and urban societies are getting bigger and bigger and bigger, they don't really have a connection with the natural world any more, there's kind of – it's a 'them and us' approach and the whole point of Festival is to bring the environment straight bang into the culture of the city and say that actually 'them and us' doesn't exist, there's no boundaries, there's no boundaries between human disciplines of science, art, literature and there's no boundaries between species, we all exist on the same planet, we all need to conserve the planet and we all need each other to survive and that's every species on the planet. You need good and bad vectors and pollinators, good and bad humans and you need every discipline to create a cohesive society and Festival is about an understanding of that and an appreciation of it and making people want to be part of the society in which we live.

AH: It's going to be fantastic.

[End of transcript]