



Shearwater Steiner School

Could you introduce us to your school?

We are Shearwater Steiner School, situated in the Byron Bay hinterland, 3.5km from Mullumbimby, NSW. Shearwater commenced in February 1993 in the home of Stan Stevens and Sally Davidson. Enrolments quickly exceeded the home capacity and in September 1993 the school moved to where we are today. We now have about 500 students at our school.

Describe your school garden.

Our school is very focused on organic gardening and biodynamic farming, but our exciting new project was the introduction of a permanent bee colony into our Year 4 classroom. Bees are contained in an observation hive, which allows students to watch all aspects of a honey bee's life through two sheets of safety glass. Bees can freely access the outdoor world through a clear tube. Working hives have also been introduced in the school yard too, including Langstroth and Kenyan Top Bar hives.

How does the garden fit into school life?

We can tie so much learning to the study of the bees including geometry, biology, pollination and food production. Students see what happens firsthand. You can tell students about these concepts, but they need to experience it for themselves. Work done with the Kenyan Top Bar hive also helps students learn more about organic practices.



Describe a problem that you have had to face or tackle.

At first some students were afraid of the bees, while others were worried that the bees would fly away and not return. Now, the kids are happy to pick up the bees in their hands and carry them around. They overcame their fear and have developed a love of nature. The bees are loyal to the queen and keep coming back to her. They all work for the greater good of the hive, which is a wonderful thing to watch and learn from.

Do you have an interesting fact or story to share?

The Kenyan Top Bar style of hive was originally developed to facilitate beekeeping in remote villages where people needed to work with organic practices and minimal equipment. Kenyan Top Bar hives were favoured by biodynamic farmers as they allowed bees to activate all their natural instincts and behaviours, ultimately improving the health of the hive. The bees can build their combs in the shape and size they want and are able to hang in a chain to make the comb, compared to other hives which focus on maximising production.

SCHOOL STORIES



We hope that by keeping bees in the Kenyan style hives that their life force will increase, as they will be able to follow their natural functions. With the world's bee population in rapid decline, it is critical for children to learn about the value of bees and their role as pollinators in the natural cycle of food production.

How has the Australian Organic Schools program benefited your school?

The Australian Organic Schools program helped us create the bee program at our school. The bees are a continual source of wonder for the students, and they have learnt so much, in particular just how loyal the bees are to their queen.

