



## *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*

Christy Lefteri

*The Beekeeper of Aleppo* by Christy Lefteri is a fictionalised account of the escape from war-torn Syria by Nuri, a professional beekeeper, and his wife Afra, a talented artist. The book starts in the aftermath of an explosion that killed Sami, their young son and struck Afra blind.

The novel is constructed as a series of vignettes that move backwards and forwards in time, telling of incidents during the couple's struggles to travel to Europe. It presents in detail the emotional turmoil

of refugees as they first determine their need to escape, and then vivid descriptions of the terrible hardships they face when escaping from their home countries. The life-threatening challenges of the trip across continents and seas is movingly described and brings to life the terrors and hardships these escapees face. It also exposes in uncomfortable detail the corruption and exploitation that many of them have endured whilst trying to reach places of safety.

## *Invasive Aliens*

Dan Eatherley

The first chapter in a new book about invasive aliens couldn't have a more appropriate subject for beekeeper readers: it's a detailed description of the frenetic search operation after the first confirmed UK sighting of an Asian hornet in Tetbury in 2016.

Naturalist and broadcaster Dan Eatherley conceived the idea for his well-researched and highly enjoyable book when on a stroll across Hampstead Heath; he suddenly realised he was surrounded by non-native plants and animals. This revelation was the catalyst for a series of journeys around the UK to see some of the many foreign species that have

made their home here, charting the effects they have had on our native flora and fauna, our economy, and our complex, often contradictory and sometimes irrational reactions to the presence of species from afar.

In the UK we are surrounded by alien species: over 3000 at the last count. But in compiling any such list, boundaries have to be defined. What constitutes an alien? How far does it have to have travelled? How did it arrive? How long has it been here?

The scientific basis for the definition of an alien species can be hard to agree but in the popular mind it seems somewhat simpler: if it bothers us, then it's unwelcome. We don't mind snowdrops, but we do mind

The content of the book was inspired by personal interactions with refugees that Dr Lefteri had during her work at the Unicef-supported refugee centre in Athens, and with the charitable beekeeping work of refugee and apiarist Professor Ryad Alsous at The Buzz Project in Marsden, West Yorkshire. This deeply poignant book brings to life the multiple challenges faced today by these refugees.

The beekeeping features of the book are brief but significant. The

hogweed. Tree bumblebees are fine, Asian hornets are not. These are simple examples that few would disagree with, but some are more tenuous: according to Eatherley, the beech is an English tree and any that dare put down roots across the border in Scotland are apparently a cause of great concern to nationalistic northern naturalists.

The book is a pleasing mixture of natural history, ecology, sociology and, given our particular heritage, nationhood and empire. The stories of how species got here are often fascinating and the analysis of our relationship with them is thought-provoking. It's a subject all beekeepers will find of interest, particularly when

story is based around Nuri's work with his cousin Mustafa. Together they once ran more than 500 hives in Syria and commercialised the honey and wax into multiple product opportunities.

The detailed descriptions of the gentle nature of Syrian bees made me quite envious, particularly when I shudder and think of some of the more vicious bees that I have bred in my time as a beekeeper in the UK.

The book details Nuri's motivation to reach England in the hope of reuniting with Mustafa and recreating their bee farming activity here, far away from the horrors of their war-torn homeland.

This is an excellent, rewarding book that is both inspirational and deeply unsettling. Minor spoiler alert: it finishes before key questions are resolved, but this, of course, could beckon a sequel. I will certainly be in the queue to buy it.

Cathy Williams  
*Zaffre Publishing, 2019.*

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we begin to consider that, under certain definitions, even the honey bee might not be quite as native as we might like to think.

Richard Rickitt  
*William Collins, 2019.*

£16.99.

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