

Beekeeping in Tanzania

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Beekeeping is traditionally practised in Tanzania, a country with widespread available sources of pollen for bees, e.g., *Eucalyptus*, *Kotschya*, *Syzygium*, *Diervillea*, *Helianthus*, *Citrus* and *Zea mays*. In spite of this, production is limited and not sufficient to satisfy domestic requirements. Beekeeping is still considered a secondary activity, carried out by a few people and combined with work in agriculture.

Apis mellifera scutellata is the main species found in Tanzania. Bee families are bred in traditional log hives made of wooden trunks 80-150 cm long, opened longitudinally, dug out inside and then reclosed with liana bindings. A hole is made at the top to allow access to bees. The hives are usually hung on trees 6 m high. Beekeepers with less experience use old circular jars of 60-80 cm diameter, provided with a side opening for bee entry, which are put upside-down in bushes. Natural swarms populate both types of hives, because they are attracted by the beeswax smell which is spread on the entrance or inside the hive. It is not the habit of the local beekeepers to capture swarming bees. After the bees have entered the hive, beekeepers visit the hive to harvest the honey.

Harvesting is often a special time in the social life of a village because all the men are involved. Tanzanian beekeepers harvest honey at night, in order to avoid being stung, because they lack proper equipment and protective clothing. Smoke from dry burning ferns is also used to keep the bees off.

Harvesting must be carried out as fast as possible, and confusion often results. As a consequence, honey and brood combs may be harvested together, or combs may be broken.

As regards health status, *Apis mellifera scutellata* does not need care, since it is not subject to diseases such as American and European foulbrood, nosema, varroosis or virus-induced diseases.

Bees' real enemies are the badgers, which love honey,

and stinging ants, or "siafu" as they are called by the local population. These ants can cause serious damage, e.g., destruction of combs and theft of honey, so that the bees are forced to abandon the hive.

Beekeepers try to protect hives from the *siafu* using rags soaked in bad-smelling substances. Hanging the hives on trees is the main way of avoiding badger damage.

Working of bees-products is usually elementary in Tanzania, since proper beekeeping equipment is not used. Honey is extracted by boiling the combs, or pressing and later straining. Both methods produce honey contaminated with pollen and brood. Extraction by boiling causes wax to rise to the surface, after which it is purified. The wax is collected in a bag used as a strainer pressed between two sticks. Discarded material is used to feed pigs.

The local population does not eat much honey, because the people believe it causes stomachache. However honey is consumed in large amounts with maize meal.

The honey trade is carried on by others, who pay beekeepers about 0.4 USD per kg of honey, and then sell it to shops in the capital. Here, the national product is sold to consumers in 400 g tins for 2.5 USD, while the imported honey, American (2.5-3.4 USD/312 g), Kenyan (1.7 USD/500 g) or Italian (1.7 USD/250 g) is sold in glass jars.

Beeswax is not used by beekeepers, but is sold to traders for 1.7 USD/kg.

Another bee product, propolis, is produced by *Meliponae*, stingless bees and sold on the local market.

NB: All prices of this article refer to 1996.

Literature

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