

For the love of the honeybee

Humans have been keeping honeybees for thousands of years, yet we are continuously learning about them. Reports of massive honeybee losses around the world have highlighted their great and important role they play in our lives. From soothing a sore throat to wound application, honey has been used for its natural medicinal properties and health benefits. The nectar bees use to make honey contains almost 600 compounds including vitamins and antioxidants. Raw honey contains simple sugars, but unlike refined white sugar or artificial sweeteners, the perfect balance of fructose and glucose in honey actually helps the body regulate blood sugar levels.

Sagpi has partnered with the enterprise development agency – African Honey Bee Trust – to provide training in the care of bees, their hives and the collection of honey by setting up beekeeping incubator farms at Mzimba and KZN plantations, enabling community members and small-scale timber growers to earn a living.

The farmers are enrolled in an 18-month training programme to obtain a 'Bee' level 1 qualification. During this time they work as commercial beekeepers and learn valuable commercial work ethics.

They are also exposed to Sagpi's stringent safety and environmental management practices. While the bees generate additional income for these rural communities, the community members provide essential wildlife monitoring in Sagpi's plantations.

New entrants work under the guidance and mentorship of experienced, senior beekeepers and after completing the semester, become fully fledged African honey bee aficionados, but what makes this project different to other



Fun facts about honeybees

- Common name: African honeybee, honeydew, honey
- Bees have five eyes (two compound eyes and three single lens eyes) and a worker bee's main eyes have nearly 7 000 lenses.
- An electrostatic charge on the bee's hairs attracts pollen and the leg brushes, then scrapes the pollen from front to back, where it collects in the pollen basket – a wide, flat area on the rear pair of legs.

less successful honey farming cooperatives, is the fact that each of the beekeepers has his/her own business or franchise, rather than being part of a collective system. Through the African Honey Bee Keeper Project (AHBKP) they receive ongoing training, mentorship, advance payment on their future honey production, equipment and preferential prices and access to global and local markets for their produce. It is a valuable conservation tool,

allowing people to derive economic benefit from indigenous flora resources in a non-destructive way, ensuring local participation in conservation efforts. It also makes a significant contribution to other forms of agriculture by effecting the pollination of economically important plants. Visit www.africanhoneybee.co.za for more information.



How to recognise an African honeybee

While still having the characteristic yellow-tinged abdomen of honeybees, the African honeybee is slightly smaller. The worker body length of a worker is 19mm, its hair and its abdomen is striped with black.

Getting around

A honeybee has two sets of wings used for flight. The wing hooks enable the bee to attach one of each set of wings together during flight for maximum efficiency.

Communicating

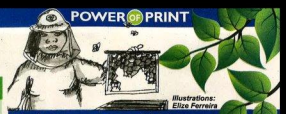
They communicate by performing a series of dance moves. Through the number of turns, duration of the dance and the moves themselves, they can communicate the distance to food and the direction of the food in relation to the sun.

Food

Honeybees forage on nectar (carbohydrate) and pollen (protein) of flowering plants and they require a large diversity of pollen and nectar from different plant sources to be healthy. While some beekeepers may supplement a colony's food with sugary water, this is not a long-term or healthy option. African honeybeeskeepers use a variety of plant species, including indigenous plants, crops and weeds, as forage resources for their bees.

Trace the taste

Honey collected by the African Honey Bee Trust is sold commercially in shops such as Dischem, under the Bee-Killed Honey brand. Every batch is unique and varies in taste, colour and aroma, depending on the nectar source visited by the bees. The trust is currently implementing their Nektar traceability system which will allow consumers to trace the honey back to the hives where it was made. Each jar of honey will be able to be traced to the specific beekeeper, location and batch characterised by season, climate and specific plants that flowered during that season. Honey may be liquid, set, or creamed. Crystallisation is a natural process and to liquefy crystallised honey, place in lukewarm water no more than 35 degrees Celsius.



Make your own Afri-hive

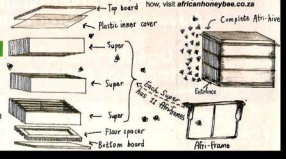
You can make a beehive with stuff that is found around your home. Many people make hives from wood but you can also use anything, grass, clay, cement and wattle.

Bees like to live in a cavity (an open space with walls around). The most important thing is to get the inside 100% right. The easiest cavity to make therefore is a box. If you make a box with a floor and a lid, the bees can live in it. You can use wood, cardboard, iron, cement, grass and plastic for the floor and the lid. Bees build their hives very easily 20mm apart.

So, if you put bits of wood inside the box where each bit of wood has a small strip with beeswax on and you space these bits of wood evenly 20mm apart, the bees will build their comb into the bit of wood. These bits of wood are called frames.

How to get the bees to move into the bee hive that you have now made?

Paint beehives that you have made onto the wooden area and also paint some old black bees wax that has some propolis that you've collected in water onto the sides of the entrance (see illustration) and at the entrances and some on the floor of the hive. Add established bee renovers (Google Bee Removal) in your area for some black bees wax.



More about the honey market

There is a global shortage of honeybees products, especially those that are raw and fairly traded. South Africa produces around 1 000 tons of honey annually, but consumes three times this volume and has to import the shortfall. Many experts agree that there is scope for at least doubling honey production in South Africa with current available resources. Each pollen-bearing beekeeper within the African Honey Bee Trust, has the potential to produce approximately 15 to 25kg of premium honey per hive annually, at 600g a jar of 10kg from 30 hives earning them an income similar to the minimum wage.