

Beekeeping in Bangladesh

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Beekeeping has long been practiced in Bangladesh. In early times it could be classified as bee hunting. It was done mainly for honey collection and is still found today. Efforts to keep bees in wooden hives probably started at the time of the Gandhian self-reliant movement in the 1940s. Prior to this people kept bees in logs, clay pots or similar methods.

In the 1970s interest in beekeeping began to increase. Beekeeping activities were started by the Government's Small and Cottage Industries Corporation and by non-governmental organisations. In 1977, an apiculture programme was financed by the Canadian Government and after a pilot period of research, training and extension it was decided that a comprehensive programme of scientific beekeeping could be developed. To provide administrative and institutional support, the Bangladesh Institute of Apiculture (BIA) was formed in 1981. BIA is a non-governmental organisation that focuses on research followed by dissemination of information.

Bees in Bangladesh

There are four species of honeybee indigenous to Bangladesh: *Apis dorsata*, *A. cerana*, *A. florea* and *Trigona iridipennis*. Among the four species

A. cerana is the most suitable for beekeeping. It is readily available and well adapted to local conditions. *Apis cerana indica*, although wild, is easy to handle. It is a multi-combed bee with honey production per colony recorded at 2–3 kg every 10–15 days during honey flow. *Apis dorsata*, locally called Rock bee or 'pahari moumachi', is important in honey production (5–20 kg per colony). Most honey available in Bangladesh comes from *A. dorsata* colonies.

Bee Plants and Honey Production

Although Bangladesh is largely a rice-cultivating country, there is enough vegetation in many areas well suited as bee forage. In the intensively agricultural areas, litchi, jackfruit, lemon, *Acacia*, *Albizia* and other leguminous trees, coconut, date, drumstick, blackberry, mango, palm nut, jambura, *Eucalyptus*, papaya, pomelo, wood-apple, banana, guava, and other fruit and shade trees are good sources of nectar and pollen. Besides these, there are huge areas cultivated for mustard, cucumbers, melons, peppers and various pulses. Litchi and mustard are important sources of honey. Bees use mustard as a source during colony build-up. One full extraction of honey measured 3 kg per colony 20 days after supering. Honey-flow season starts in late

September lasts until April/May. Average honey production is 10–20 kg per colony per year. Highest production so far recorded was 35 kg from one colony in four months (November, December, March, April). In the present market, pure honey can be sold at Tk 150 per kg earning Tk 1500–3000 per colony per year.

Extension of Beekeeping

The main objective of BIA is to introduce beekeeping to the rural poor to help them earn additional income and to pollinate agricultural and horticultural crops. We have achieved significant success in introducing beekeeping through training and extension, research and

marketing. We have also formed Beekeepers' Associations for practicing beekeepers trained by BIA as model honey-producing centres. Organising Beekeepers' Associations is extremely important to BIA as they are the local-level production groups and the focus of all the Institute's activities. After completing training, beekeepers join an association that assists them with equipment and provides follow-up. Under the guidance of the Research and Demonstration Centre of a particular area, the Beekeepers' Association controls the activities of its beekeepers so that there are disciplined and organised groups with high standards in rural areas.