

NEWS FROM GHANA

Bia Biosphere Beekeepers, Western Region, Ghana

The Bia Biosphere Reserve in west Ghana covers some 7,770 hectares and is where the country's major forest animals are found including the forest elephant and the endangered bongo. It's been closed to people to preserve one of the few remaining areas of precious virgin forest. This has forced local communities who depended on the forest to find new ways to make a living. Those selected include growing palm oil and mushrooms, snail farming and beekeeping.

There have been four one-off beekeeping training initiatives in the past nine years, but no training materials were left and there was no follow up. Individuals were given hives, smokers and bee-suits, but with no co-operative working and no support beekeeping wasn't working for them! When we were asked to help we found beekeepers had very patchy knowledge and felt isolated with little idea how to develop their beekeeping into a small business. We took on the challenge of refresher training courses, providing teaching materials and - most importantly - extension visits to iron out problems and answer questions. Our project manager Trisha Marlow says "This is a new challenge for me. In past projects everyone started beekeeping together but here everyone is at a different level."



Beekeeper and his family outside their home, Bia area, photo Trisha Marlow



Typical farm at the beginning of the rainy season, photo Trisha Marlow

The seeds of a new CBO, the Bia Biosphere Beekeeping Association have been sown. We were lucky that a very capable chairman was on hand. The area is relatively inaccessible for part of the year, the accompanying photos show the first of the rain, and so our work will also include training local area extension workers and

providing added value training to extend the reach of the benefits from this project. Later there is also a real possibility of an Apitourism initiative with tourists visiting the nearby reserve.

So far we have completed the first refresher course for 50 members from the cluster of five communities which was voted a success by those attending.



Project community at the beginning of the rainy season, photo Trisha Marlow