



# Hekenofom (Hope) Beekeepers, Ghana

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Only the drivers of the least roadworthy taxis from Asewewa town will attempt the half-hour journey down the 'rough road' to the Hekenofom project, and we are grateful for that. In the rainy season the rutted and pot-holed track is sometimes impassable even for the weekly market trucks, making the trip both a feat of endurance and a risk to health on foot in pursuit of essential cash income. In this part of Upper Manya Krobo district in the Eastern region of Ghana, the villagers are highly resilient and resourceful out of necessity.

Asewewa market is well-known in Ghana as the subject of a former basic school textbook. Vibrant, bustling, with the simplest of infrastructure, and crucial to the economy of the area with traders from several towns in the region. Yet there is no honey on sale, no added-value products made from high-quality Ghanaian ingredients, coconut oil, shea and cocoa butters, baobab oil, honey and beeswax. It is our aim to enable that to change.

The community is blessed with significant areas of secondary forest, including acacias, which bees forage on avidly. As stewards of the landscape, the beekeeping group and their traditional Chiefs aim to balance nature with better productivity of local food crops due to increased pollination of cassava, maize, beans, pepper, okra, orange, mango, banana and plantain by honey bees. Alongside improved nutrition, uninterrupted education, affordable healthcare and other benefits can become realities with 'honey money'.

Most here are new to beekeeping, but thanks to previous projects by our local administrative partner CENCORD (Centre for Community and Rural Development), the community is well-organised with a robust village banking scheme to ensure honey income will be carefully managed, and they are highly motivated to succeed. Many children do complete their secondary education here, the majority then migrate to the cities hoping for secure and lucrative work, which, sadly, is often not the case.

## Project hubs

In Ghana, I co-ordinate three 'hubs' of beekeeping project activities through a regional approach. First, a day's travel north from Accra, there are projects centred on Bono, Ahafo, and Bono East regions, and the soon to be expanded foundation project beside the Bia Forest, a UNESCO site. Second, a day's travel west the new Cape



Asewewa market. All photos copyright of Trisha Marlow.

Three Points Forest Reserve project at the request of WAPCA (West African Primate Conservation Action) who champion threatened primates and work tirelessly to obtain funding for alternative livelihoods. Third, the four Eastern region projects are, thankfully, closer to Accra. Work involves five male trainers.

Thanks to the generosity of The Worshipful Company of Wax Chandlers, women trainees will shortly begin work with the team. This will provide both role models as future trainers and an essential voice for the challenges that women face in becoming successful beekeepers in Ghana.



**The challenges**

With Ghana's inflation rate standing at 32.3% at the end of July, timber costs have soared and so have food and fuel prices. Our project participants need to fund the basics, not special treats or luxuries. So, while the Kenyan top-bar hive is perfect for the purpose, we continue to diversify with low-cost, sustainable hive types. The needs assessment flagged the presence of raffia palm and bamboo, perfect for low-cost sustainable hives with reasonable longevity for time-poor subsistence farmers. Yet, this has proved highly frustrating. The local stands of bamboo were flooded in very heavy rains and inaccessible during the beginners' course. Then, a long dry season, again more extreme with climate change, saw bushfire destroy them. It will take the length of the project to recover. Additionally, as the rich/poor divide ever widens, bamboo is increasingly seen leaving many of our project areas by the truckload for Accra and Kumasi to be used largely for scaffolding.

The beginners' course for 25 members was, frustratingly, very delayed by the pandemic. Fair selection was assured using our Ghanaian project Baseline Assessment tool. Incredibly, the first extension visit resulted in the impromptu harvest of some honey from an absconded hive, greatly enjoyed by the members. Such was their enthusiasm, by the April visit they had harvested most of a 'yellow gallon' (25 litres), which was slightly fermented. Supervised harvest and extraction training around November time is eagerly awaited, and colonisation stands as I write at 80%, a very high figure for the first season.



*Apis mellifera adansonii* worker out foraging.

High colonisation rates are a challenge due to the nature of the bees. *Apis mellifera adansonii* are flighty, defensive and prone to absconding as a consequence of resource shortages, disturbance due to pests, predators, beginner handling, over-harvesting, bushfire, weather extremes and several other factors. For GRTN (Ghana Regional Trainer Network) trainer Michael Sakyi, that means teaching careful handling and apiary/hive management but also, crucially, being mindful not to over-harvest; hard indeed when honey is money for everyday essentials.

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The annual project planning meeting, April 2022.

It takes a higher skill level to master swarm transfer and splits with absconding being so high. Regular colonisation reports is a key tool. These allow remote comparison of apiary sites, they are useful for monitoring attendance for baiting and for apiary work to reduce fast-growing plants from providing routes for ants, termites and other pests and predators, and for planning harvests. Yet even this is a challenge here; there is just one vantage point with any mobile signal.

Hekenofom Beekeepers were chosen as our World Bee Day project for Ghana. Managed by myself as partnership manager through the practical and business skills of trainer Michael and with administrative support from CENCORD project officer Eric Baah, the project is participant-led, for its success is largely in their hands and needs to be sustainable into the future.



*Apis mellifera adansonii* swarm.

The project attracted the attention of National Bee Supplies, and they very generously offered full funding of the livelihood phase of the project for three years. The community received the news in April at the annual project visit. They were delighted! As I write, swarm season is approaching and Michael is busy preparing new hives for assembly and siting, and sourcing further PPE. By the time you read this, the beekeepers will be that bit closer to a more secure future thanks to both National Bee Supplies and the bees.

**Support a Ghanaian project**

If you would like, as a beekeeping association, business or individual, to support a Ghanaian project then save the date for our Big Give Christmas Challenge Campaign! During the week of 29 November to 6 December 2022, all donations will be matched, doubling your impact. We invite you to 'Bee part of the Story' as we work to train more beekeepers and artisans of value-added beeswax products.

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