



TRADITIONAL BEEKEEPING IN NIGERIA -  
A EDITORIAL SUMMARY FROM "BEEKEEPING AMONG THE TIV"

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University of Ibadan

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The Tiv people, who inhabit most of Benue State in Central Nigeria, have had an aggressive reputation for many years, and their traditional practice of beekeeping is associated with this. One of the uses to which they are reputed to have put bees was as a weapon against unfriendly incursions into their territory.

This use of bees was intricately connected with witchcraft, and the Tiv allegedly kept bees specially for use in warfare. The bees were put in horns containing powdered poison, which they carried into battle when they were released to attack the Tiv's enemies.

The more important uses of bees to the Tiv were, and are, more usual. Honey is a staple part of Tiv diets, and an ingredient of their medicines. Beeswax is an important soldering wax for repair of kitchen utensils. The Tiv are also aware of the importance of bees to the pollination of crops.

Beekeeping is treated as a skilled occupation amongst the Tiv, and experienced beekeepers can train others in the elementary skills of making simple hives and harvesting the honey. Tiv hives are made from a gourd or an earthenware pot, which is waxed and sweetened with cow-dung to encourage the bees to settle.

The Tiv do not apparently seek to locate their hives near particularly good nectar sources, but do make efforts to destroy trees that produce particularly bitter nectar. It normally takes 5-6 months for the bees in a hive to store enough honey to warrant harvesting the bees are then smoked out and the honey combs collected.