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World Bee Day

Bees are an integral part of our lives, with many swarms "hidden" in plain sight. These small, yet crucially important insects have a way of colonising in the most ingenious of places and we humans often only become aware of them when they start protecting their honey harvest. Ignorance kills bees, but luckily there is a growing number of skilled beekeepers across Namibia to assist you with any problems that may occur.

Beekeeping is the practice of the intentional maintenance of honeybee colonies in hives by humans. The science and art of managing honey bees is called apiculture, or beekeeping, and it is a centuries-old tradition. In Namibia, both traditional and modern beekeeping is recognised as a profession that is more than 100 years old, with some of the first laws on beekeeping originating in Walvisbay back in 1923. While casting the world into disarray, the recent COVID pandemic highlighted our need to become more self-sustainable on both an individual basis and as a country. Bees are essential to the production of food, medicine and also as a potential contributor to sustainable income.

The benefits of having a healthy Namibian bee population include food security, sustainable biodiversity and ecosystem health. Although there are many pollinators, bees are the most important link in this chain. The most important Namibian bee species that is commercially farmed is classified as - *Apis Mellifera Scutellate*, better known as the western honey bee.

On Friday 20 May the world celebrates World Bee Day. This day gained international status during 2018 when the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) decided to raise awareness for the essential role that bees and other pollinators play in the sustainability of global food systems. The simple fact is that bees keep people healthy and the planet alive, yet they face so many challenges today. There is widespread concern that pollinators are rapidly declining, although the need for pollinators is constantly in growing demand.

Over the last two years, Agra ProVision has trained more than 120 beginner beekeepers and the good news is that more than 85% of these participants acted on their newfound knowledge and started their own apiaries. These individuals range from hobbyist beekeepers with 1-5 hives, up to commercial beekeepers with 50-200 hives across the length and breadth of Namibia.

Namibia has a proud history of beekeeping with government participation. Since 1996, the Namibian government, individuals and other stakeholders have taken part in several internationally funded projects and initiatives to promote beekeeping. The Beekeeping Association of Namibia is committed to continuing the development of beekeeping and all related activities in a structured way.

The Beekeeping Association of Namibia was formally established in 2021 and membership has been growing rapidly. The Association is a legally registered non-profit civil society organisation. Their main aim is to empower local Namibian beekeepers through information sharing and networking, while acting as an umbrella body for all apiculture matters and in doing so, to create an enabling environment for growth. The Association wants to enhance sustainable income generation connected to food security, poverty reduction and good environmental practices and also by becoming a resource for policymakers. Bees provide a critical link within many environmental and agricultural sub-sectors, and the association aims to assist with developing markets and contribute towards an overall agricultural growth. The overall objective remains greater environmental protection and biodiversity.

In terms of grassroots development, the Beekeeping Association of Namibia has a daughter organisation called Women for Bees. They are focused on creating awareness of pollinators, environmental protection, youth participation, and empowering women through beekeeping, agriculture and entrepreneurship. To strengthen woman beekeepers through knowledge sharing, protecting local heritage and gaining cross border experience with international alliances is a long-term goal.



One that through suitable networking, could ensure sustainable beekeeping in Namibia with markets both locally and beyond.

Keeping bees is an amazing experience. It is enlightening, humbling, educational and rewarding. Supporting local markets and protecting indigenous species should be an important every day objective for all Namibians. The Beekeeping Association of Namibia hopes to achieve large-scale awareness and support from all sectors and stakeholders within the country, since the importance we as a nation place on bees will reflect both directly and indirectly on the health and wealth of Namibia as a whole.

More information is available on the Beekeeping Association of Namibia Facebook page.

<https://www.facebook.com/beekeeping-association-of-namibia>

For any training requirements please follow Agra ProVision on Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/agraprovision>

Other interesting bee facts:

- A location where bees are kept is called an Apiary. An Apiary in German is called a "Bienenstand" or "Imkerei".
- From existing feasibility studies, there is enough vegetation to support commercial beekeeping operations in Namibia to produce enough honey to meet the entire local demand.
- By law, all imported honey must be irradiated and super filtrated. Because of this, it is usually then diluted with sugarcane syrup. This honey offers no health benefits.
- Consuming locally produced honey from your area offers a benefit of reducing and alleviating hay fever, since consumers build up their resistance every time they ingest honey made from the pollen that triggers their allergies.
- A queen bee can lay up to 2,000 eggs per day.
- Losing its stinger causes a bee to die.
- Bees have four wings, six legs and five eyes, and they can beat their wings 11,400 times per minute!
- The honey bee is the only insect that produces food that is consumed by humans.
- A typical bee's lifespan is between 30 and 60 days. The queen can reach an age of five years, because she feeds on royal jelly.