

Beekeeping Around the World

GRAHAM ECKERSLEY

This brief article was written by one of IBRA's newer members, Graham Eckersley, in June this year, just before the 'hand over' of Hong Kong back to China.

Sunday last was the first break in a run of wet days and prompted a three-man foray into the hills of the North West New Territories to service 'wild' hives known to our teacher Mr Lai Yip Ping, Patrick (fig. 1).

Convenient access to some hives was through an army camp which, in a few weeks will be handed over to the Peoples Liberation Army. Future access may be

very difficult unless the Commander is a latent beekeeper or has a sweet tooth.

The first hive visited was found about 5 years ago in a hollow below a south-facing rock outcrop on a very steep grassy slope at about 200 m above sea level. The hive has been scooped out a little every year and now fully occupies a hole of about 10 litres in volume, some black plastic



FIG. 1. The honey and the honey master — Patrick Lai.

sheeting and cement/earth plaster have kept it dry and stable.

Surrounding hillsides below the hive are mixed woodland with a fair number of the mountain tallow tree (*Sapium discolor*) source of the second nectar flow of the year. The nearest valley floor, about 2 km wide, is village flat lands with lichee, longan and wampi fruit trees and some tallow trees (*Sapium sebiferum*). The tallow and mountain tallow flower in June and the fruit trees provide the first nectar flow in April–May. Villages usually face south and are protected on the north side by mature woodland of camphor (*Cinnamomum camphora*) and yellow camphor (*C. parthenoxylon*), ivy tree (*Schefflera octophylla*) and incense tree (*Aquilaria sinensis*) much of the village woodland is spring flowering.

Friend Toby and I have not yet mastered the intricacy of the local floral calendar but we are assured by Patrick that three harvests are the measure of a hard-working colony and by extension, a hard-working beekeeper.

This wild colony had done well yielding over 5 kg of dark, dense honeycomb much of which was probably stored in this year's exceptionally long dry period, October to March. The bees (*Apis cerana*) were small, quite yellow and remarkably quiet — most settled on Toby's right buttock (fig. 2) and remained there until the hive was closed with close fitting rocks and a bit of plaster.

Rain sweeping in over Shen Zhen new town and the China border stopped play for the day.

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FIG. 2. Toby Emmeth MBE — keeper of the bees.