

How to Manage the Bees



Beekeepers in Nigeria inspect a top bar hive

Additional images provided by Mike Brown, Brian Durk and Claire Waring

Basic Beekeeping Manual 1: How to Manage the Bees (© Author Pam Gregory, who offers this as her gift to beekeepers in developing countries)

PLANNING THE WORK

Visit the apiary often. Only do one thing on each visit, and have a work plan that is relevant to the time of year. These are examples of work plans:

1. Clean around the hives and check that they are colonised and safe.

2. Inspect inside the hives to see if:

- **The bees are building combs correctly (one comb on one top bar);**
- **The queen is doing her work correctly;**
- **There are any leakages of water;**
- **There are intruders like ants, beetles or spiders;**
- **There are diseases harming the bees.**

3. Harvest honey:

- **Harvest only ripe honey;**
- **Do not harvest brood;**
- **Do not kill the bees;**
- **Leave some honey in the hive as food for the bees.**

4. After harvesting:

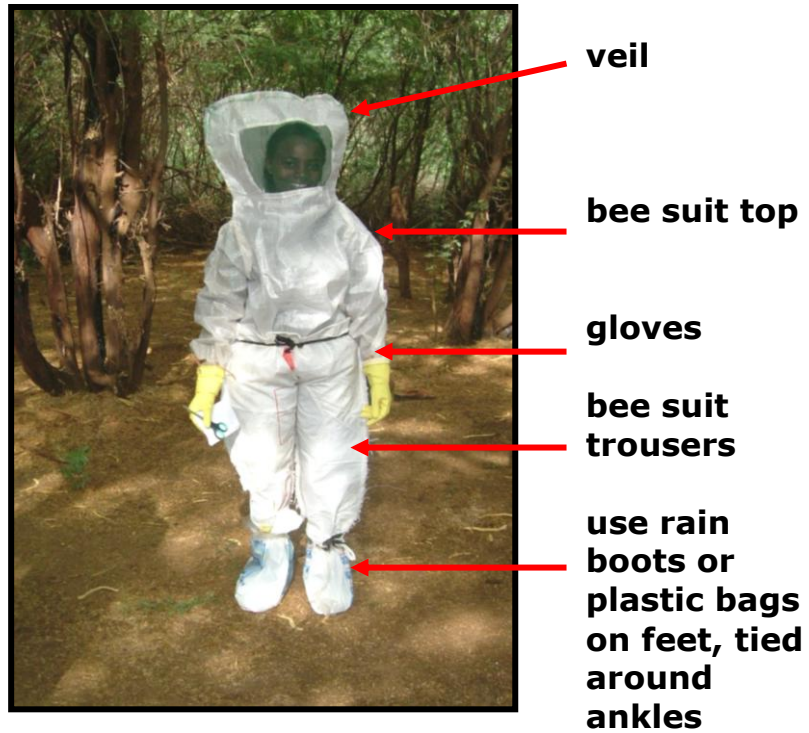
- **Take out old, empty combs;**
- **Rearrange the remaining combs so there are no gaps between combs;**
- **Leave some honey for the bees;**
- **Feed the bees if possible or necessary.**

5. If bees have absconded:

- **Harvest all the combs to reclaim the wax;**
- **Clean dirt and debris out of the hives;**
- **Carefully sterilise inside the hives to kill any pests and diseases by using fire;**
- **Rewax the top bars and replace them inside the clean hive.**

THIS SECTION WILL HELP YOU TO INSPECT A HIVE SAFELY AND UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU SEE

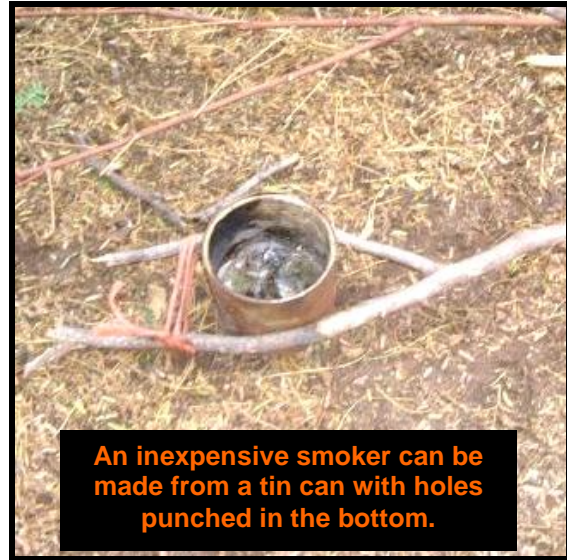
1. Wear protective clothing.



2. Make sure you have all your tools ready. It is good to have a friend to help.



3. Light the smoker so there is plenty of cool smoke. Maize husks, dry grass and rotten wood all make good smoker fuels.



4. Smoke the entrance well and wait for the bees to become calm.



5. Smoke under the roof well and then remove the roof.



6. Check where the bees are by tapping the top bars. A hollow sound indicates the empty part of the nest.



7. Gently remove the first empty top bar.



8. Gently ease the next comb so it is free and easy to remove.



9. Lift each comb out carefully to inspect it.



Here the beekeepers are inspecting the activity of the worker bees and the queen to make sure that the colony is building up correctly.

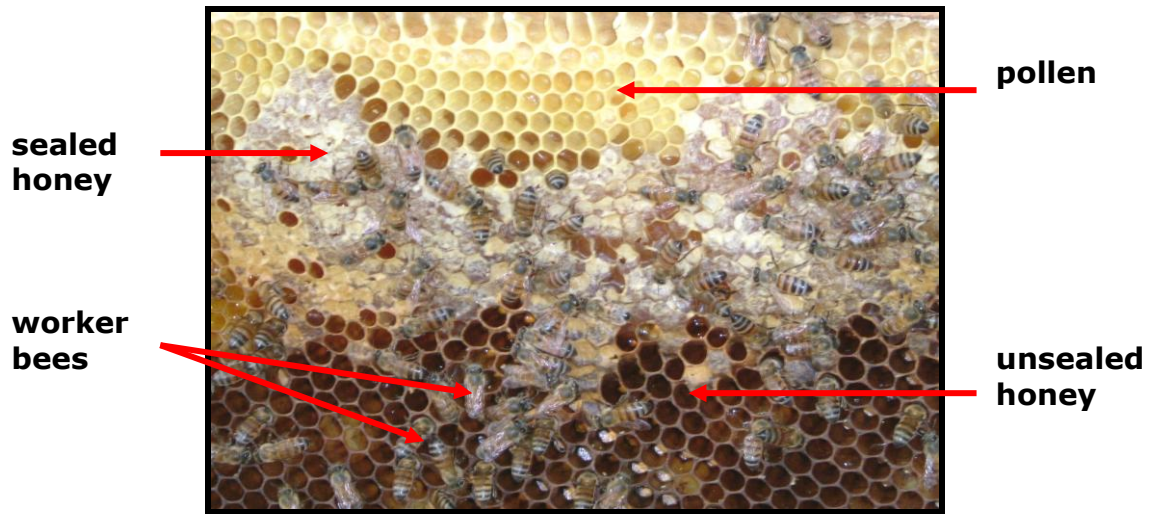
10. Only move one comb at a time.



11. Notice how the natural shape of the comb in this wild colony is similar to the shape of a comb in a top bar hive.



12. These worker bees are storing honey and pollen.



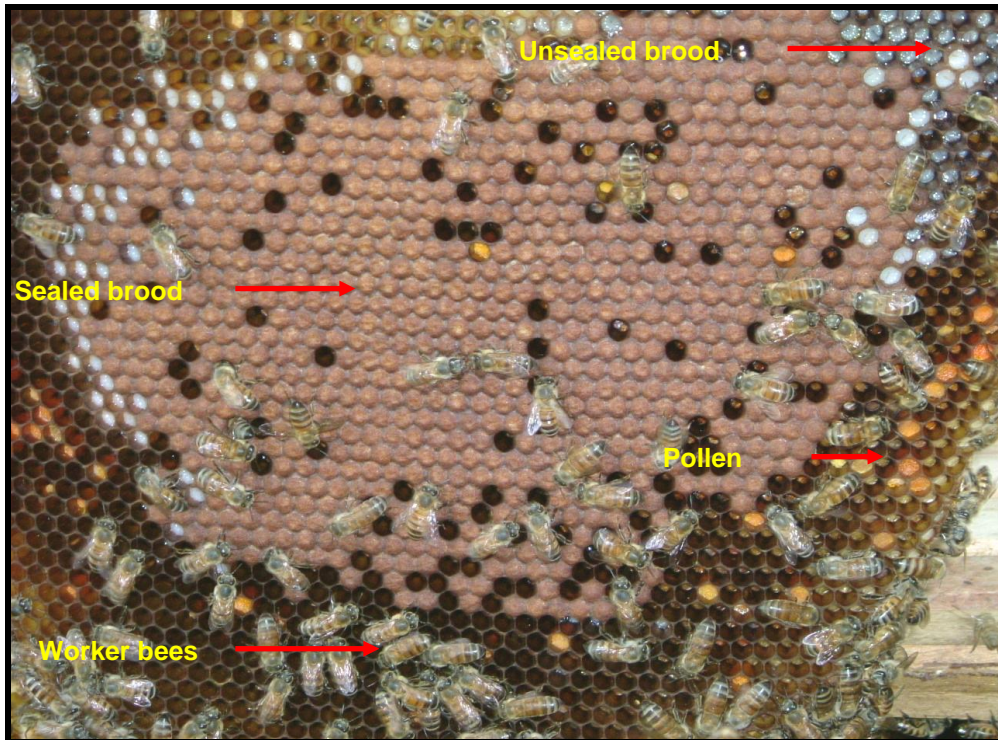
13. These worker bees are building new wax honeycomb.



14. This hive is very crowded and needs harvesting.



15. These worker bees are looking after brood (the young bee larvae before they hatch). Can you identify the sealed brood, unsealed brood, worker bees and pollen in this picture?



16. These bees have bad disease and should be destroyed by burning the comb.

