



Eva Crane Trust

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TITLE: Directory of important world honey sources.

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Bee products

Directory of important world honey sources

IBRA has been successful in obtaining funds from the International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, for the compilation and publication of a *Directory of important world honey sources*. Our Annual Report for 1980 (*Bee World* 1981, p. 80) gave brief details of the intention to carry out a Survey of World Honey Sources, and of work done under a grant awarded by UNESCO to the International Commission for Bee Botany in 1979.

The increasing international trade in honey has led to a great need to identify the plants in different countries that are the main sources of honey. Flavour and aroma are among the many properties of fresh honey that are determined by the plant sources, and this should also be true of honey purchased by the consumer. Commercial classification of honey is, however, often based largely on its opacity to light as recorded on a Pfund grader. This in itself is not an indication of quality, except insofar as light (transparent) honeys are *in general* less likely to have a strong flavour (good or bad) than dark (opaque) honeys. The aim of commercial processors is to even out consignments with what they consider to be characteristics of different acceptability to the public.

The book *Honey: a comprehensive survey*, published in 1975, was the first of its kind. In writing the chapter on honey plants, it became painfully clear that knowledge was lacking as to the identity of important honey sources in the world as a whole. Honey sources of many individual countries, especially in Europe and North America, had been well studied, and at various levels: from beekeepers' observations, from the experience of honey traders, from the identification of the pollen in the honeys, and so on. In that book

211 plants were finally listed, with the following information where available:

- (1) Botanical name, common name; type of plant; (briefly) world distribution and importance; estimated honey potential (kg honey obtainable per hectare).
- (2) Characteristics of the honey in liquid form: colour, density, viscosity (body), flavour and aroma, natural granulation, any special features.

In addition to this list, the best available published source of information on the honey plants of each country was cited.

In 1980 *A book of honey* printed a slightly enlarged world list of plants, and tabulated their presence or absence in the temperate zones and tropics/subtropics of the different continents. No further progress seemed possible without a systematic investigation and compilation from available published and unpublished sources of information.

The work done under the UNESCO grant to ICBB in 1979 resulted in a card index of 2500 plants reported as honey sources in the 46 countries for which records were searched; many of the plants occurred in more than one country, of course. Plants were grouped as N1 (major honey source), N2 (medium) or N3 (minor), and where possible they were similarly evaluated as pollen sources. Plants that yield honeydew are included as well as those producing nectar.

The *Directory* will concentrate on the plants that are, somewhere in the world, a major source of honey (N1), and on the honeys entirely or mostly from each of these plants (monofloral honeys). Up to 800 plants will be included, the main entry for each being listed in alphabetical order of botanical name, and each entry will give brief details, as far as they are known, of the plant itself (type, distribution, environmental requirements such as rainfall and salt tolerance, and economic uses); its significance as a honey source where it occurs; and the honey produced from it (composition, physical properties, and any especially notable features). Attention will be paid to the species of honeybee that produced the honey.

The *Directory* will include a number of indexes leading to the main entry for the plant, including: common names of plants; honeys that granulate very rapidly or very slowly; the few honeys that are toxic; plants that are considered worth planting because they are high honey producers and have other economic uses as well.

The leaflet *Source Materials for Apiculture* No. 3 'Planting for bees in developing countries' (see *Bee World* 1982, p. 137) gives some idea of what the *Directory* entries will look like. They will, however, include much fuller information than was possible in the leaflet.

Information in the *Directory* will cover the whole world. It will be especially important for honey produced in the countries of the subtropics (which include the major honey exporters), and the tropics, where the honey sources are least known.

Any readers who would like to be associated in some way with this new project should write to me, explaining what they can offer. We are already assured of the co-operation of the International Council for Research on Agroforestry (ICRAF), Nairobi, and of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, where work on the *Directory* will be linked with that on the Survey of Economic Plants for the Arid and Semi-Arid Tropics (SEPASAT) now in progress.