

Honey on Top: Material Histories of Bee Keeping in the Cherangani Hills, Kenya

Guide to the Dataset

Project Summary

This project documents the material histories of beekeeping in the Cherangani Hills, western Kenya, in order to comprehend how it has been integral to the structuring of Sengwer and Marakwet indigenous lifeways and local forms of traditional ecological knowledge. Such research is particularly important as honey production across the region continues to decline due a complex array of factors, including the spread of agriculture and the resultant depletion of forest vegetation. The reduction of apiculture has been further exasperated by repeated attempts to forcefully evict local communities from the highland forests as a part of the Kenya Forest Service conservation policy. Whilst not exhaustive, this document offers a brief introduction to the region and the lifeways of indigenous communities who reside therein. In doing so, it acts as an invitation into the EMKP repository.

This document provides a brief account of the project methodology and asset structure. Information presented here is accompanied by two further PDFs (metadata numbers EMKP2019SG03-0178 and EMKP2019SG03-0179) that offer readers a more in depth introduction into material presented in the repository.

Team roles, responsibilities and contributions

The primary team members undertaking this project included Project Lead, Dr Samuel Lunn-Rockliffe, and two in-country Collaborators, Mr Timothy Kipkeu Kiprutto and Mr Joseph Kimutai Cheptarus. Both Collaborators have substantial research experience in the area through a series of wide ranging [Citizen Science](#) projects led by the UCL's Institute for Global Prosperity and played a central role in the construction of an appropriate workplan built a rich qualitative understanding of apiculture in the region:

Project Lead Lunn-Rockliffe was responsible for undertaking all of the necessary paperwork (ethics approval, NACOSTI research permit, interim and final reports, budget management etc), purchasing all equipment and organising project timelines. Lunn-Rockliffe also edited footage and photographs and organised assets according to the structure agreed by the wider team. Lunn-Rockliffe was responsible for writing video annotations and producing accompanying written documents.

Collaborator Kiprutto acted as the primary point of contact, helping to arrange accommodation and field logistics and drawing upon his past research experience to help build relationships with the community and potential participants. Mr Kiprutto was also instrumental in the designing of data collection, including when, where and with who it would be possible to collect quality information. Importantly, Mr Kiprutto was instrumental in re-designing parts of the project with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, and took on much responsibility for communicating with participants to corroborate information when the project lead could not travel to Kenya. Mr Kiprutto also spent significant time transcribing and translating interviews.

Collaborator Kimutai assisted in arranging the fieldwork logistics, and, as he lives in the immediate research location, was more readily available to speak to potential participants. Mr Kimutai was also more actively involved in the documentation process, helping to direct

participants, shoot footage and review data at the end of each day. With the onset of the pandemic, Mr Kimutai was able to provide eyes and ears ‘on the ground’, helping to corroborate pieces of information and send photos via his phone. Mr Kimutai also spent significant time transcribing and translating interviews in the second half of the project’s life.

Recognition is also due to Mr Campbell Martin, who is an Oxford Archaeology DPhil student who self funded his part of the trip to join me as a Research Assistant in order to gain research experience in Kenya. Mr Martin was predominantly responsible for taking photographs in a way that more readily allowed Mr Kimutai and myself to focus on capturing video and sound. Thanks is also due to Mr Duncan Suter who assisted Collaborators Kiprutto and Kimutai in translating and transcribing all of the interviews.

Methodology

This project worked closely with members from the Sengwer and Marakwet communities who historically resided in the Embobut Forest block, Western Kenya. The distinction between these populations is slight but not trivial, being predominantly based upon differences in local dialect and complex stories of migration. The Sengwer have had a more explicit relationship with the highland forests and are a much smaller population than their Marakwet neighbours, whose activities extend into the semi-arid plains of the Kerio Valley to the east of the Cherangani Hills. That said, the Marakwet and Sengwer have both conterminously resided in the Embobut Forest for several generations and it was thus important to work with members from both communities to explore how beekeeping within the highland forests have been important in the structuring of daily activities and knowledge through time¹.

The project methodology for working with these communities is outlined below.

Audio-Visual Documentation: The backbone of this project involved documenting the process of making a beehive with three individuals (two elders and a younger man). One of the elders, Kipchai, continues to construct beehives in the same way that his grandfathers had taught him and was particularly willing to demonstrate his craft to the other participants as well as the video camera. The second elder, Jacob, has a wealth of knowledge surrounding honey production and ethnobotany, but had never made his own beehive, instead choosing to buy them from specialist craftsmen such as Kipchai. Jacob was thus very keen to be a part of the documentation process and learn about the construction process in detail. The younger man, Ruto, makes his own beehives but uses slightly different techniques, often improvising with artificial materials instead of organic resources from the forest. Over the course of seven intermittent days, these individuals worked together to make the beehive. This involved a plethora of interesting techniques, including cutting, carving, stitching, charring and smearing dung. Each of these processes were filmed and photographed from start to finish, including the location of different activities, movement between locations and techniques used.

Interviews: Seven semi structured interviews were conducted (these have been subdivided for to make material more navigable in the repository). Six of these were in Sengwer or Marakwet and were conducted via a translator. The seventh was conducted in English. These interviews explored oral histories that focused upon the historical importance of honey production and how it is integral to local lifeways. They also explored forms of traditional ecological knowledge, documenting different plants that are used for paramount for beekeeping activities,

¹ A sensitivity towards inclusive forms of documentation was also particularly necessary given a series of ongoing and highly contested debates surrounding community rights to land as discussed in the ‘Histories of Honey: An Introduction’ of this project.

including the materials used to construct beehives and the flowering plants of which are associated with honey production.

Participatory Mapping – Using information gleaned from informal discussions and the interview process, a series of ground-truthed maps were created using a handheld GPS. By physically walking the landscape with Mr. Kimutai and willing participants, we created a series of GPS tracks and waypoints of important locales in order to create a material record of how beekeeping is entwined with the wider landscape.

Asset Structure

Assets have been organised into a simple structure whereby individual videos correspond to different techniques and processes associated with the construction of the beehive and associated activities (e.g. cutting tree, stripping bark, splitting beehive, charring beehive, honey harvesting etc). Each activity has between 5-10 associated photos. In addition to the process of creating a beehive there are a series of interviews that have been transcribed and translated. These add context and with in depth narratives of apiculture in the region. Annotations and subtitles to all videos are saved as separate assets in Elan (.eaf) format, and interview transcripts are also found as separate PDF files. All accompanying geospatial information is compiled into 5 separate shape files (.shp).

Type	Amount	Composition	Corresponding Asset Numbers
Audio-visual	33	- 23 videos documenting the process of making a beehive from start to finish - 8 video interviews - 2 videos of harvesting honey	- 1-23 - 137-144 - 146-147
Audio	1	- 1 interview	- 145
Text	13	- 1 guide to the archive. - 1 document providing context to the material in the project - 1 document demonstrating the material culture of beekeeping from across Africa - 10 written transcripts from interviews	- 178 - 177 - 179 - 167-176
Photographs	123	- 123 photos of the different stages of making a beehive	- 24-139
Annotation	13	- 10 Interview annotations (transcriptions in Marakwet/Sengwer and English and contextual information) - 4 videos annotated videos with contextual descriptions	- 156-162, 163-165 - 154, 155, 163, 166
Shapefile	5	- 5 Shapefiles depicting trackways, land use patterns and historic settlement areas	- 148-152

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