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Propolis has antiseptic properties to neutralise any bacteria, fungi or virus

Bees make wonder drug

By Halima Shaban

BEES have given mankind unique products that scientists have still failed to copy. Apart from honey and wax, bees also give something useful to health but human beings have ignored it.

It is called propolis. Sometimes called bee glue, propolis is a sticky resin that seeps from the buds of some trees. The project manager of Malaika Honey, Simon Turner, says bees gather propolis, carry it to their hives in their pollen baskets and blend it with wax flakes secreted from special glands on their abdomens to deposit it on the interior of their hives.

"Bees use propolis, which has antiseptic properties to neutralise any bacteria, fungi or virus that enters the hive," Turner says.

"Propolis ensures a clean environment for the bees." Turner however regrets that people simply destroy it when they harvest honey. Even those who do organised bee rearing, never harvest propolis mainly because of ignorance.

Turner started a project, Malaika Honey, to teach bee farmers the importance of all bee products. The project, found at Musajjalumbwa, Road also harvests propolis and processes it into medicinal products.

Turner says propolis contains about 55% resinous compounds and balms, 30% beeswax, 10% aromatic essential oils and 5% bee pollen.

Turner said the composition of propolis varies depending on the environment, adding that: "But, in most parts of Uganda, it is normally dark brown in colour. It can also be green, red, black and white depending on the sources found in the hive area."

Uses of propolis

"Propolis is a medicinal



Simon Turner of Malaika Honey displays processed and unprocessed propolis

product that can work as an antibiotic, soothe inflammations, speed up healing of wounds, ease rheumatic pains, combat fungal infections and strengthen the body's immune system," Turner says.

According to www.jones-bee.com, propolis is one of the most powerful antibi-

otics found in nature. It is rich in amino acids and trace elements, has high vitamin content, including at least 38 valuable bioflavonoids which give it a high antioxidant value. "It is found to have an inhibitory affect on at least 21 species of bacteria, nine species of fungi, three species of protozoa and a

wide range of viruses," the site says. The site also quotes many studies which have shown propolis to be highly antimicrobial.

"We have used propolis to treat colds, bronchitis, stomach ulcers, respiratory disorders, liver and kidney inflammation," Turner says. "Other areas include ear, nose and throat infec-

tions and toothache. Propolis also heals cuts, burns, boils, warts and scabies."

Bee keepers can sell their propolis to Malaika honey. Gerald Nzioka, the general manager of Payless Supermarkets, says he has used propolis on his sore throat and it worked perfectly. His wife also used it to cure a chronic fungal infection of the foot.

"We have treated many people with propolis," said Dan Nabaasa, a medical counsellor at Kebisoni Health Centre IV Rukungiri.

Turner says it is available in different forms. As a tincture, it is used for disinfecting and protecting cuts and abrasions. In capsule form, it works as a supplement against bacterial infections. Propolis in chewing gum form is used to cure sore throat and swollen gum.

"It is a non-toxic substance with no harmful side effects," says Turner. "However people who are allergic to bee-stings can also have an allergy to propolis. Should you feel nausea or develop a rash discontinue its use."

Malaika Honey has filed an application to National Drug Authority (NDA) for permission to dispense propolis as a drug. A letter signed by the NDA executive secretary, Apollo Muhairwe, says propolis has been placed on the list of notified local herbal medicines.

However, Dr Charles Mukisa, a medical officer of Kinyara Sugar Works, has a lot of doubts. "It is difficult to quantify the drug content in propolis," he said. "Since it is a herbal medicine, the side effects are not known and you cannot tell whether you are taking an over dose or under dose. In any case, I do not even know whether it works or not."

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