

1. Biodiversity Conservation: A Natural Relationship between Soliga Tribe and Wild Bees BR Hills Wild Bee Honey Cluster, Karnataka



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'Soliga', an isolated tribal community restricted to only Karnataka & Tamil Nadu, with a population of 40,000, lives in the dense forests of Biligirirangana Hills (BR Hills) and Malai Mahadeswara Hills (MM Hills) of Chamarajanagara District of Karnataka. The Soligas belong from the Dravidian family that have been engaged in shifting cultivation & collection of non-timber forest produce (NTFP) like amla, soap nut, tubers, seeds, mushroom and most importantly honey that contributes to 60% of their income. The forests hold a cultural and sentimental significance in the lives of the tribe due to which they are considered sacred and are worshiped like gods. Moreover, they have co-existed with the tigers of the region to an extent that as years passed by, a rise in number of tigers was observed. So they have been preserving every essence of forests since ages. Located in the vicinity of Biligirirangaswamy Temple (BRT) Tiger Reserve, it makes BR Hills and MM Hills a tourist attraction, because of its pilgrimage value and home to nature and forest lovers.

Wild Bees or Rock Bees migrate between plains and hills and are most commonly found in these forests on large trees or rock cliffs. These wild bees are known for higher yield. Traditionally the Wild bee honey processing was done through simple filtration techniques. It was harvested by exposing the nest to smoldering fire to chase the bees away from the comb area and then comb is cut and honey part is separated. In this process, some part of the comb along with immature eggs of the bees gets destroyed resulting in loss of huge number of bees. This method is not only unhygienic but also damages the colony causing a huge loss of valuable pollinator.



Dr. Madegowda, a Soliga himself, has been living in these forests from past 40 years. He holds a PhD in Social Work and contributed in introducing sustainable ways to efficient cultivation & processing of honey. He did this by mobilizing the honey harvesters to form a co-operative society called “Shree Biligiri Rangaswamy Soligara Samskara Sangha” in 2018 to empower the cultivators involved in wild bee honey extraction. After facing frequent displacements from their own forests due to changes in government’s forest policies and years of lobbying with bureaucrats, they succeeded in claiming legal rights of their land and collection of NTFPs through which they now ethically procure and process honey. They are well versed with the traditional techniques of cultivating honey, but Dr. Gowda trains them on sustainable cultivation and productivity enhancement without damaging the environment. Presently he works as a Secretary of the Co-operative society and believes that his education played a key role in mobilizing the community, knowledge transference, bringing awareness, courage and confidence in the lives of tribals. IMEDF identified their potential & developed a cluster named BR Hills Wild Bee Honey Cluster. The cluster development activities are aimed towards providing safety kits to the cultivators, advanced equipment for efficient cultivation and training to 500 cultivators for skilled handling of honey combs. He believes that the SFURTI scheme will help the tribal stay connected with the forests by pursuing their traditional activity and at the same time ensure economic security.