

和蜜
Wamitsu

天生为蜜狂

IT ALL COMES OF LIKING HONEY

The 8:00 A.M. Sunday train from Shinjuku was busier than I expected. Trendy young couples sat drowsy-eyed. Raucous groups of impressively equipped elderly hikers made early raids on their day's provisions. I gazed out the window at a sparkling morning, the air fresh after the previous day's typhoon—the enervating heat of the summer completely swept away.

I was on my way to Inadani, a small town in the Japan Alps. Why? As the “bear of little brain” once said, “It all comes of liking honey.”

And not just any honey, a special kind of Japanese honey. There are many places in Japan that produce honey, but almost all from Western honeybees—species introduced to Japan soon after the country emerged from self-isolation.

But in recent years efforts have been made to revive and commercialize honey production from Japanese bees. Inadani honey is such a product: of exceptional quality, exceptional taste—and exceptionally high price.

Story & Photographs by Tony McNicol
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Into the Hive

I'd come to meet one of Inadani's beekeepers, 74-year-old Masahiro Tominaga. With his wife he manages 15 hives with about 300,000 bees, up on a hill behind his house.

Even from the bottom of the slope, the hum is like the sound of cars on a distant highway. Protected by a beekeeper's hat, but a little nervous nonetheless, I watch as Tominaga opens up one of the hives.

He takes no notice of the bees ricocheting off his clothes as he draws out a moist slab of honeycomb that makes my tongue tingle just to look at. Then, at a safe distance, we roll up the netting on our hats as Tominaga's wife prepares a chunk for us. I suck hungrily on the impossibly sweet honeycomb and follow her instructions to spit out the empty wax into the grass.

Tominaga is one of the members of the Shinshu Japanese Honeybee Association, a group of 700 beekeepers from all over Japan. Thanks to the organization—and decades of

周日早上8点，列车缓缓地驶出新宿车站，车里的拥挤程度超出了我的想象。穿着时尚的年轻情侣在列车轻摇的节奏中，一路睡眼惺忪；装备齐全的老年远足客，一边大声谈笑，一边已经等不及要去提前享用背包里的美食。随着车窗，我眺望远方，清风带来舒爽的空气，一扫前一天台风肆虐的天象，将夏日使人倦怠的热意卷走，不留痕迹。

我此行的目的地伊那谷，是日本阿尔卑斯山中的一座小小城市。要是好奇我为何远道而来，“小熊维尼”的话就是解答：“因为我——天生为蜜狂。”

这里的蜂蜜与众不同，只有靠东瀛的水土才能造就此种风味。虽然日本各地有诸多蜂蜜产区，但几乎都使用西洋蜜蜂采撷。这些舶来的小家伙，在日本解除锁国政策后不久就漂洋过海，来到这个东方之国度定居。

然而近年来，日本国内的一些有心人开始重新制造并推销这些源自日本的蜂蜜。伊那谷蜂蜜就是这么一款和风珍品，品质绝佳、风味超群、价格不菲。

蜂房探秘

我来这里拜访富永政弘，74岁的他是伊那谷的养蜂人。他的养蜂场就在住宅后面的小山上，他和老伴一起照料15个蜂房，呵护总共30多万只蜜蜂。

tireless work by founder Asakazu Tominaga (no relation)—the production of traditional Japanese honey is thriving.

That's no mean feat, because making Japanese honey, known as *wamitsu*, is no easy task. In the West, beekeeping goes back thousands of years, so the bees have become domesticated over time (although far from completely so). They are relatively easy to handle and, importantly, produce lots of honey.

Unfortunately for Japan's beekeepers, however, their native honeybees are notoriously fickle and difficult. As well as giving only modest yields, local bees have a disconcerting habit of buzzing off at the flick of a wing. Many a Japanese beekeeper has woken to find a queen bee departed overnight, taking the other bees and part of his livelihood with it.

While Japanese honeybees are generally stronger than Western bees (the latter are now shrinking in number worldwide for reasons that are not fully understood), another problem is that the former are bedeviled by moths that invade their hives.

Sweet Solutions

Asakazu Tominaga came up with a clever solution to both the moth problem and the wanderlust of Japanese bees. He designed a special grill to be placed at the entrance to each hive. The space between the struts is just large enough to let out the worker bees (or there would be no honey, of course) but keeps the queen safely at home. It also pre-



Beekeeper Masahiro Tominaga (above and below) works calmly with 15 hives and about 300,000 bees on a hill of his farm in Inadani, using a special grill (opposite) to keep moths from entering the interior of a hive (opposite left).

vents moths from getting in.

Ingenious. But Asakazu Tominaga's greatest discovery was of an altogether different kind; namely, a plant that is to Japanese bees what catnip is to cats. Red buckwheat.

It is common for Western bees to stick to mainly one kind of flower, but Japanese bees are an omnivorous adventurous bunch, another reason it is difficult to keep them in one place. Asakazu, however, found a plant that

would turn them into homebodies.

Red buckwheat came to the attention of Japanese experts in the 1970s. After long research by a local company and Akio Ujihara, a professor from Shinshu University, a way was found to bring the plant from the 3,800-meter peaks of Nepal and grow it in Japan.

Since 1993, Takano Ruby has been cultivated in a valley of the Tenryu River in-between the not quite Himalayan, but still impressive, peaks of the central and southern Japanese Alps. Today there are 4.2 hectares of red buckwheat growing in Inadani.

A Matter of Taste

The honey produced from the red buckwheat is sold via a local company, Takano, at their Takano HeartWorks shop. Somewhat incongruously, the company's main business is selling office chairs. But, having branched out into the health food business some years ago, now Takano HeartWorks honey sells at a premium—¥10,000 for 350 grams, compared to ¥1,000 yen a kilo for lesser nectars.

"Many of our customers are elderly people,"





还没上山，从山脚下就能隐约听到万千蜜蜂振翅的嗡响，犹如远处在公路上行驶的汽车，马达轰鸣。我虽头戴防护帽，心中仍觉得有一丝不安，看着富永慢慢地打开了一个蜂房。

他抽出一块沾满蜂蜜的蜂板，对纷纷掉落在衣服上的蜜蜂似乎浑然不觉。而在一旁看着那些新鲜蜂蜜的我，不自觉地直咽口水。接着，在保持足够的安全距离后，我们擦开防护帽上的纱网，尝了尝富永妻子递上来的一块蜜巢。我迫不及待地开始吮吸蜂蜜，让这甜到不可思议的琼浆缓缓流入口中，然后再遵照她的指示，将舔完的蜜蜡扔进草丛。

富永是信州日本蜜蜂会的会员，该会由700位全国各地的养蜂人组成。在养蜂组织的努力下，及

养蜂人富永政弘（旁页上下图）干起活来沉着冷静。在依那谷的小山上照料着15个蜂房、约30万只蜜蜂。他用一种特殊的网格（上图右）来防止蚊子入侵蜂巢（上图左）

该会创始人富永朝和（并非政弘的亲属）几十年来的全身心付出下，传统的日本蜂蜜产品才得以再次盛兴，行销全国。

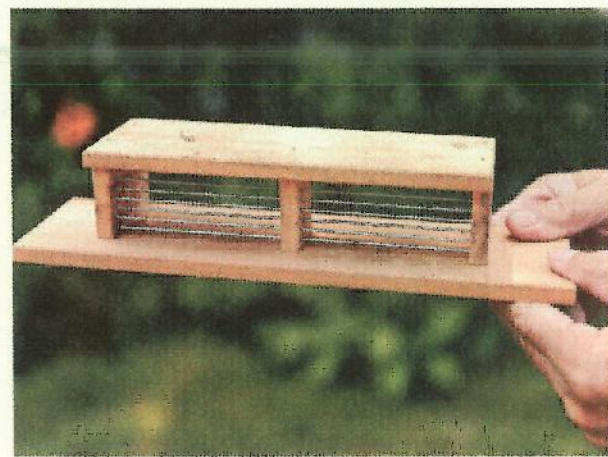
今日的现状实为来之不易，因为制造日本传统的“和蜜”，是一项十分艰巨的工程。在西方，养蜂的传统可以追溯到数千年前，蜜蜂在与人类相伴的岁月里，很早就被驯化（当然还未驯完美）。西方的蜜蜂不但相对易养，更重要的是，还具有极高的产蜜能力。

而生产和蜜的养蜂人就没有这么幸运了，土生蜜蜂是出了名的性情多变，难以操控。土生蜜蜂产蜜稀少，而且还容易飞得不见踪影。很多和蜜养蜂人都有过一夜醒来发现女王蜂彻夜带走了其他蜜蜂的经历，一番心血只换来失落。

虽然日本蜜蜂普遍比西方蜜蜂生命力强（后者由于不得而知的原因，在全世界的数量正在减少），但同时也有别的麻烦——它们的蜂巢往往会遭到蚊子的侵扰。

甜蜜方案

富永朝和找到了一种一举两得的妙法，既能抵挡蚊子的骚扰，又能收住蜜蜂们放浪不羁的心。他设计了特殊的网格放在蜂房入口，其间的空隙只让工蜂进出（要不然采不了蜜），而让女王蜂安全地呆



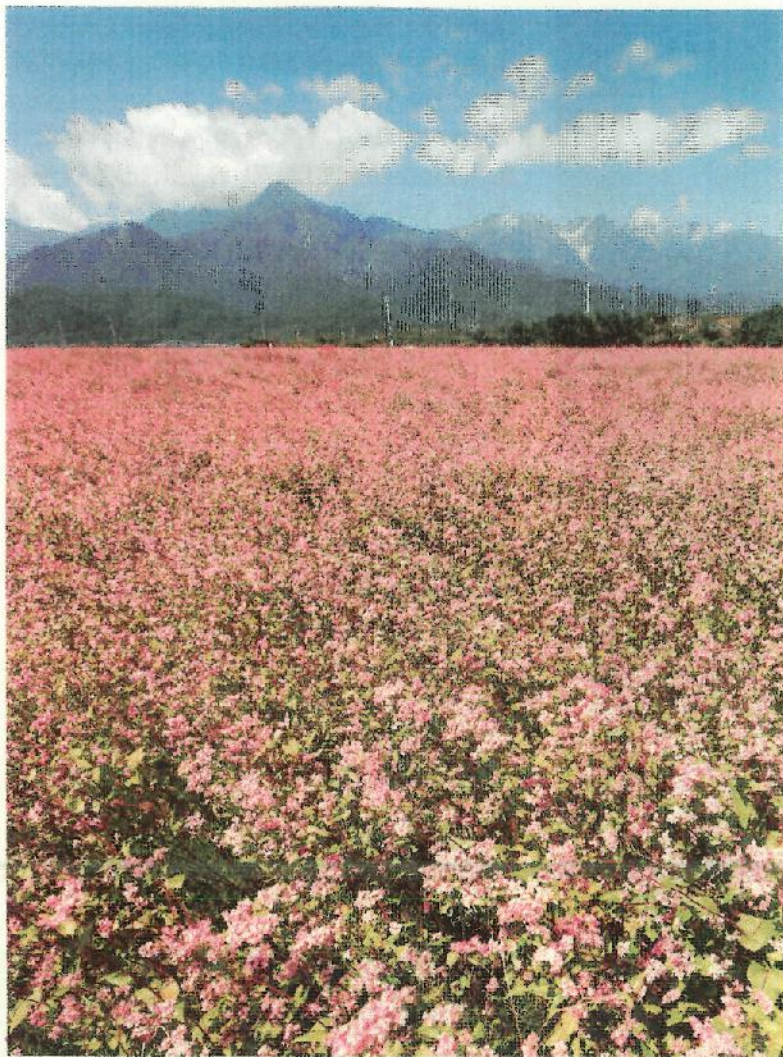
在巢中，同时也阻止了蚊子的入侵。

这是一个妙想天开的主意，却还不是富永朝和养蜂生涯中最伟大的发现。就像猫爱猫草，他发现日本蜜蜂也有一种最爱的小花——赤荞麦花。

西洋蜜蜂往往只爱采单一品种的花蜜，而日本蜜蜂却很杂食，对食物充满冒险精神，这也是很难让它们不四处游荡的原因之一。富永朝和的发现，让劳碌的日本蜜蜂终于能变成居家型的昆虫。

赤荞麦从1970年代起就引起了日本专家的重视。一家本地公司联手信州大学教授氏原晖男，经过了漫长的研究过程，终于找到了将赤荞麦花从尼泊尔海拔3800米的高峰上转种到日本的方法。

自1993年起，赤荞麦“高岭红宝石”开始在天



says Takano HeartWorks's Tatsuhiro Iizuka. "The honey is expensive, so it tends to be bought by people with sophisticated taste."

It's so pricey, in part because the harvest is so small. The beekeepers can only collect honey once a year or once in two years, and sometimes there's no honey at all. It also boasts a generous dollop of healthy polyphenols, thanks to the red buckwheat.

But most importantly, there's the taste.

"Normal honey is good with bread, but I recommend eating this straight from the spoon," says Iizuka.

I take his advice and try a little when I get home. The honey is darker than normal and has a sweetness that is somehow richer and pure, almost fruity. There is almost no aftertaste.

I'm reminded of another sage saying from the famous bear:

"The only reason for being a bee that I know of is making honey... and the only reason for making honey is so as I can eat it." ■

Inadani beekeepers use red buckwheat — effective for bees as catnip for cats — to keep the wanderlust of their charges under control. Result: Inadani honey, delightfully dark and tasty, mainly bought by elderly honey aficionados.

依那谷的养蜂人种植的赤荞麦花——蜜蜂喜欢它们就像猫儿钟爱猫草，好让放浪成性的蜂儿心有定所。用这种花酿出的蜜就是依那谷蜂蜜：漂亮的深褐色，极佳的口感，深受中老年蜂蜜爱好者的青睐。

龙川的一个峡谷中种植。这里虽没有喜马拉雅的险峰插云，却也有日本阿尔卑斯中南方的高山环绕。如今，伊那谷已有 4.2 公顷的赤荞麦健康生息。

味觉至上

赤荞麦花酿成的蜂蜜通过当地的一家公司 Takano 株式会社销售，店名就叫“Takano 心水店 (Takano HeartWorks shop)”。该公司的主业是经销办公椅，做蜂蜜买卖看上去有些格格不入。不过从数年前开始，公司把经营触角延伸到健康食品领域，如今的 Takano 心水蜂蜜售价昂贵（350 克 1 万日元，而一般的蜂蜜 1 公斤 1 千日元），却不乏知音惠顾。

“我们的很多客人都是老年人”，Takano 心水店的饭冢达弘说道：“我们的蜂蜜价格不菲，所以来买的客人大多有一副挑剔的味觉。”

价格高昂的一部分原因要归于十分有限的收获量。养蜂人每一至两年才能收一次蜂蜜，有时候甚至毫无所获。而且采自赤荞麦花的花蜜富含多酚，有益健康。

当然最终决定蜂蜜人气的关键，还是它的风味和口感。

“普通蜂蜜配面包很棒，但是我们的蜂蜜，我建议直接用勺舀了吃”，饭冢解释自家蜂蜜独特的享用方法。

我接受了他的建议，回家后就尝了一口。和普通蜂蜜比起来，这种蜂蜜颜色暗醇，甜香丰腴，纯正无瑕，挾花果芬芳。而且后味清雅，不留甜腻。

此时我脑中又掠过了那头全球知名小熊的金玉良言：

“我想，做小蜜蜂唯一的理由就是要酿蜜……而酿蜜唯一的理由就是让我吃掉它。”

