

Explore the world of beekeeping <Part 4>

Visiting Ishizuka Bee Farm (1)

In June 2019, we had the opportunity to visit Ishizuka Bee farm in Miyagi Prefecture. As an example of Japanese beekeeping, we will report on its activities in this issue and the next.

Ishizuka Bee farm was established in 1997 by Takeo Ishizuka in Koya district of Marumori Town in the southern part of Miyagi Prefecture. Mr. Ishizuka, from Chiba Prefecture, became a disciple of a beekeeper in Kagoshima Prefecture after graduating from university, and subsequently became independent after developing his skills under his master for about two years. The main reason for choosing Marumori Town was that there were few beekeepers around, so there was little competition for bee forage.

Currently, Mr. Ishizuka manages about 200 colonies of honeybees with three staff members; one beekeeping staff, one sales staff and one staff general affairs



An apiary at Ishizuka Bee Farm

manager. According to statistics, the average number of bee colonies per Japanese beekeeper in 2018 was 22.2 colonies, but if you were a full-time beekeeper, you needed more than 100 colonies. Many beekeepers in Japan migrate seasonally from south to north in the Japanese archipelago to find nectar-producing plants, but in the Tohoku region, many beekeepers do not move their bases, and Ishizuka Bee farm also follows this pattern. Although they do not move their base, they have 10 apiaries nearby and collect nectar while moving the hives to the next apiary in about 1-2 weeks according to the flowering period of the nectar source.

As shown in the table, nectar collection starts from rape and apple blossoms that start to bloom in late April, followed by horse chestnuts and black locusts in late May. Mid-June is the peak of the bee farm nectar harvest. After the peak season, the source of nectar decreases, but they continue to collect nectar from persimmons in late June, chestnuts in

early July, and wildflowers on the banks of the Abukuma river from late August. Then, from late November to mid-April, they move their beehives to Kashiwa City, Chiba Prefecture to overwinter.

Their annual honey yield is about 5 tons. In general, full-time beekeepers produce a few items in large quantities and sell them to wholesalers, but Ishizuka Bee Farm produces about eight types of honey and sells them at roadside stations, farmers markets, inns and hotels. Currently, they also manufacture ice cream and beeswax candles, but in the future, they would like to work on high-value-added products such as hand cream, soap, and waffles that use honey. Since there is still demand for honey, they are considering increasing the number of bee colonies, and they would like to rent forest lands to plant and manage horse chestnut and black locusts as nectar sources, and increase the scale of production.

In addition to honey production, another important source of income is the lending of bee colonies for pollination to horticultural farmers. Unlike honey production, which fluctuates from year to year, pollination services provide a stable income, which is important for management. Approximately 100 colonies will be rented to strawberry farmers in Miyagi prefecture and apple farmers in Akita prefecture through agricultural cooperatives. Nectar cannot be expected from beekeeping at strawberry farms, but it is a valuable source of income in the winter when there are no flowers. At apple farms, by contrast, honeybees collect nectar at the same time as pollination during the rental period of about 10 days, so, it also contributes to honey production.

In the next issue, we will report on the technical aspects of beekeeping and the activities of the Zambian trainee at Ishizuka Bee farm.

Location and timing of nectar collection and beehive rental for pollination at Ishizuka Bee Farm																
Activity	Location	Nectar plant	Number of colonies	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	
Nectar collection	Kashiwa city, Chiba pref.	Cherry	200													
		Cherry	200													
	Marumori town and nearby area	Rape	20													
		Black locust	100													
		House chestnut	100													
		persimmon	200													
	Chestnut	200														
Akita pref.	Apple	100														
Rental for pollination	Miyagi pref.	Strawberry	100													
	Akita pref.	Apple	100													
Overwinter	Kashiwa city, Chiba pref.		150													
	Marumori town and nearby area		50													