

## Beekeeping

The interview with Marko Vukotić was conducted by Maja Todorović, on March 5, 2022 via Zoom



Marko Vukotić was born in Užice, where he still lives today. He is 38 years old and is a traffic technician by education. He works as a football coach and owns a private catering company.

Maja Todorović (MT): **Marko, you don't make a living from beekeeping, but you practice beekeeping. How come?**

**Marko Vukotić (MV):** For me, beekeeping is a family tradition that I want to nurture and preserve. My grandfather, Boriša Vukotić, was one of the most famous beekeepers in the Zlatibor district [western Serbia, prim. MT]. Because of him, the elders from Užice knew me as well - "You are the grandson of Boriša the beekeeper?" My grandfather passed on his love for bees, his knowledge, and skills in beekeeping to us, younger ones. I am the third-generation beekeeper in the Vukotić family. Now I have an apiary stationed in the village of Drežnik, near Užice.

From my grandfather, I learned how to approach bees, how to take care of them, how to make honey, how to produce other bee products such as royal jelly or how to extract honeycombs. I also learned a lot about vegetation, bee grazing, and the role that bees play in pollinating plants and preserving biodiversity. My grandfather also taught me about the healing properties of honey and other bee products.

**MT: In your opinion, why is beekeeping important for the Zlatibor region?**

**MV:** For the Zlatibor region beekeeping is important from the aspect of encouraging the production of typical products of our district. In this way, conditions are created for the beekeeping craft to become a source of basic or additional income for members of the local community. It is important that we have the Association of Beekeepers of Užice, which connects all us beekeepers from this area. The Association is very active and motivates people to engage in beekeeping.

**MT: To the best of your knowledge, how is beekeeping related to other expressions of living cultural treasure?**

**MV:** Beekeepers have their own customs about encouraging the swarming of bees. There were customs in which ritual songs were sung and some rituals were performed for the swarming of bees in the spring and summer, but that is rare in our country now. Regarding other forms of living cultural treasure, I think that beekeeping is primarily related to traditional crafts, especially carpentry and waxing. Carpentry because making baskets requires specific carpentry skills. Waxing because candles and everything else that is made of wax is made thanks to beekeepers. In my opinion, the most important thing is that engaging in beekeeping means knowing the healing properties of beekeeping products in the past and today. Apart from the fact that honey and bee products, especially royal jelly, are still used today in making creams and elixirs, it is important to mention apitherapy. These are techniques of using honey and bee products in treatment that have been developed for centuries and represent a special type of traditional medicine.

**MT: In your opinion, how important is beekeeping for other communities in Serbia?**

**MV:** You have beekeepers all over Serbia. The richness of our nature, its diversity, enables the production of quality honey and other quality bee products. The need to move bee colonies to pasture, which does not have to be only in, for example, the Zlatibor district, but also in other parts, of Serbia. Beekeepers' fairs gather beekeepers from all over Serbia to exchange knowledge and experiences, but also to offer "hospitality" for the bees to have a variety of pastures.

The richness and diversity of nature and vegetation make honey and bee products from Serbia recognizable for their quality even beyond our country. This is evidenced by the demand for our products abroad. Export opportunities certainly represent an encouragement for the further development of beekeeping in our country.