



SWEETNESS FROM DOWN UNDER

*A Devon man is revealing the wonders
of honey from Australian bees, discovers*

CATHERINE COURTENAY

DEEP IN THE FORESTS OF AUSTRALIA there's a species of eucalyptus which only flowers every 15 years. Just imagine the excitement of tasting honey produced from the pollen of those flowers.

This rare experience is one that Jason Hayward-Jones is bringing to the UK. The agricultural consultant, who went to Churston Ferrers Grammar School and trained at the former Seale-Hayne Agricultural College, is a co-founder of Gustare Honey, a range of monofloral raw honeys from Australia.

Spending most of his life working abroad and now back home with his Australian wife and their two children, Jason has fallen under the spell of the Aussie bees and the trees from which they make their honey; trees like the Spotted Gum eucalyptus, which apparently makes them quite angry.

"The flowers open up in the morning and the bees collect the pollen, but around lunchtime they close; it's like taking vodka from a drunk! They go mad." Jason laughs as we sit in the sunshine outside his local, the Church House Inn at Stoke Gabriel.

These individual characteristics are key

'It'll take over six hours a day to check the hives and they do it by hand – all day every day. It's very intensive, a labour of love - and that's why they become so immune to bee stings'

to Gustare as each jar of honey reflects the species of tree it comes from. There is no blending (the honey is taken straight from the hive and filtered just once) and there are around 50 varieties to choose from, all unique in both taste and colour.

It seems fitting to be tasting each of the four current Gustare honeys in a pub because, like all good ideas, this one had its origins when Jason met colleague Paul Costa for a pint in Alice Springs.

Jason was working with Aboriginal corporations, directly helping indigenous people manage their lands. It was the latest job in a demanding career that had seen him traverse the globe, working for the United Nations and aid agencies, helping countries rebuild agricultural economies in war zones and after environmental disasters.

"Paul builds houses; he used to come and see me and we'd go to a pub, and one day he said: 'Did you know I'm a beekeeper?'"

A month or so later, we started talking again about beekeeping and honey. He invited me to his place where I saw he had a couple of tons of honey in his shed; I'd never seen anything like it in my life!"

It turned out that beekeeping was a big part of Paul's life. Australian beekeeping operates on a big scale, with keepers moving their hives to different forests throughout the year, a process which keeps the bees healthy.



Gustare honey co-founder Jason Hayward-Jones

Many are so dedicated they spend days out in the wilds monitoring and watching the hives and recording every detail of flowering times and honey collected.

Jason says: "It'll take over six hours a day to check the hives and they do it by hand – all day every day. It's very intensive, a labour of love."

Jason flinches when thinking of the bravery of the beekeepers, showing photos of them handling hives with no protective gear. He recalls one of the times he went out with Paul.

"We got in the car and Paul put a defibrillator in the back - this is serious stuff. But if it gets hot they'll take their shirts off and light up a cigarette!" he chuckles.

"Then I turn up dressed looking like a spaceman and it's 'Here's the pom!'"

"It's quite something to watch though...it's overwhelming," he says, suddenly serious.

In the past their honey would be sold to big companies, where it would be blended to create a single product and keep prices down. Now however, they can sell different types through Gustare – a factor which has huge appeal and adds to a sense of pride in their product says Jason.

Some varieties will only be available at limited times, so Jason and Paul have created four categories, Delicate, Mild, Rich and Strong into which every variety can fit.

With Paul at the production end, Jason works from Devon and he's approached various people to test the range, including chef Alyn Williams of The Westbury in Mayfair who hit on the idea of using one of them in a rum cocktail. There are also plans to work with Moët Hennessy on a drinks product.

Jason is delighted to be back home, where it seems he's brought a welcome dose of Aussie charm and humour. Friends and locals are understandably keen to sample the honey tasters Jason carries with him; so keep an eye out - if you see a smiling guy with an Aussie accent and rucksack, you may just be in luck. ♦

MANUKA MAGIC

Jason and Paul have also launched an Australian version of Manuka honey.

This special honey has long been known to have anti bacterial properties and other health benefits.

It's mainly produced in New Zealand, and can be very expensive, but the same trees from which the bees gather pollen are also in Australia, but called Jelly Bush. "Unlike many types of New Zealand Manuka, the Jelly Bush variety does not have a medicinal taste, it's sweet and fragrant. The reaction we've had to people tasting it here has been fantastic," says Jason. gustarehoney.com

