

# Queen Bees in Ginza

GINZA HACHIMITSU PROJECT SPREADS TO OVER 100 CITIES IN JAPAN, HELPING COMMUNITIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT

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GINZA is known for many things - everything from glitzy brand-name department stores to smokey evening bars - but it is not so well known as a venue for green projects. Today, much of the buzz on the street has to do with a recent bee-keeping project led by Mr. Atsuo Tanaka, which involves a greening folk-craft initiative that aims to inject some new life into a traditional corner of Tokyo.

Called Gin-Pachi (“Gin” from Ginza, and “Pachi” from *mitsubachi*), the project started off small in 2006 and mostly as an “adult hobby.” The roof top of 11-story Marrioner Building had nothing more than ventilation equipment, so Mr. Tanaka and his group chose the site to lay sods to form a small field and set aside a corner for beekeeping, including over 30,000 bees, hives, racks, fencing and honey-making equipment. Volunteers were recruited to assist with the care of the hives, including the all important queen bee, and taught the necessary skills for taking care of the *Apis cerana japonicus*, which is reputed to have a comparatively mild temperament.

Mr. Tanaka states that one aim of the project is to foster a stronger sense of community in Ginza, which does in fact house a residential district to accompany the many department



stores in the city centre. People from surrounding businesses join in bee-keeping events and their ideas are solicited for new products based upon the honey produced.

Today, the Ginza Mitsubachi project not only sells honey, but many associated consumer goods using honey and wax, such as craft beer, cakes, ice cream, honey drinks, make-up and candles. Even a new high-ball - the honey chu-hai - was invented as a local refreshment that is sold in some local bars.

The bees gather pollen from the surrounding gardens and parks within a three-kilometer radius, including



the Imperial Palace, Hibiya Koen and Hamarikyu Garden. The resulting honey is less sweet and more floral in flavor than supermarket fare, and has earned the moniker of “Royal Honey” due to the proximity of the imperial family’s own garden. Reputedly, the honey changes flavor with the season as new flowers come into bloom.

This kind of urban revitalization is becoming more common in Japan as people search for new ways to combine life and business in their communities. It is also an example of a low-cost industry reaping greater rewards as the demand rises for this honey in Ginza’s high-end bars and restaurants. These types of “craft” industries might be termed *yaruki* (“Go for it”) projects which foster traditional crafts and techniques that do not displace already established industries and can play a role in fostering environmental sustainability.

**Mr Tanaka's beekeeping project is a recent buzz on the streets of Ginza**

Other such projects include growing gardens on skyscraper rooftops, such as mitsumata bushes (*Edgeworthia chrysantha*) used in the production of washi paper. Various other urban centers in Tokyo have also caught on to the bee-farming project, and there are other bee-keeping rooftop locations in Shibuya, Akasaka, Ekoda, Tama, Omiya, Sapporo, Sendai, Nagoya and Kitakyushu.

On a more serious note, bees can also be an indicator of environmental health. When air quality is good, bees thrive;

when pollution abounds, populations decline. Mr. Tanaka is pleased to report that the Ginpachi population appears to be stable and, thus, the surrounding air quality is comparatively good. Moreover, since many species of flower and plants rely upon honeybee pollination, they do more than simply make honey and health-products - they are vital in the reproductive cycle for new generations of flowers. **17**

