



# A SWEET DEAL

**A** LITTLE BROWN-AND-WHITE bird flies across the East African grassland. Her sharp eyes scan the tall grass. She lands in a grove of trees and listens. What's that buzzing sound? Bees have built a hive in a big hollow branch. The bird loves to eat beeswax and juicy bee larvae, but she's too small to challenge a whole swarm of bees.

Luckily this little bird has a secret tool for getting that delicious meal without getting stung: humans! She's a greater honeyguide, and birds of her species have been guiding tribes in East Africa to honey for thousands of years.



Greater honeyguides are found in Eastern, Central, and Southern Africa, but they're most common in Eastern Africa.

Do all bees do this swarmin' thing?

Not all. But our species—type—of bee sure does.



by Emily Cambias

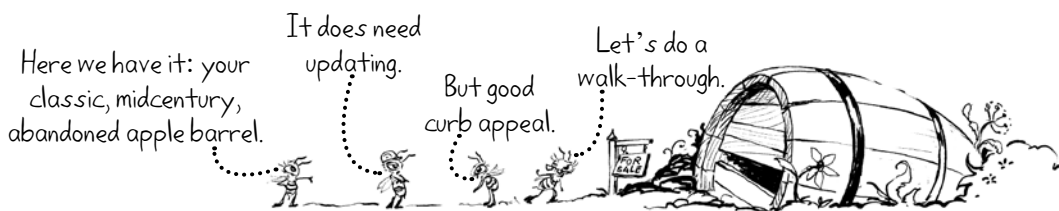


The honeyguide flies back above the tall grass, looking for humans. When she finds them, she chatters loudly to attract their attention. The local tribes know that this call means the bird is ready to lead them to honey. They grab their tools and chase after her.

People around the world keep tame birds like chickens as pets and farm animals. What makes honeyguides special is that they're wild, not tame or trained. They don't learn their honey-hunting skills from their parents, either.

Honeyguides are nest parasites. They lay their eggs in other birds' nests. The other birds take care of the honeyguide chick, thinking it's their own. This means the honeyguide's special song and behavior is innate—they know it without having to be taught.

When the honeyguide sees humans coming her way, she flies up onto a branch or high rock and flashes the white spots on her feathers. The bird flies from perch to perch, showing the way to the beehive. As they walk along the path, the people





1) A male honeyguide sits back and watches the humans work. 2) They start by making smoke at the entrance to the hive. Smoke calms bees so they don't attack. 3) Wild bees build hives deep inside hollow branches or trunks. Getting the honey out takes a lot of work. 4) The African honeybees will rebuild or find a new hive.



Um, did you remember to say "thank you"?

make noise to let the honeyguide know that they're following her trail.

When they reach the hive, the honeyguide sings a new song to say, "Here it is!" At the base of the tree, the humans build a fire. They use smoke to calm the bees and break the hive open with an axe. Gathering honeycombs from inside, they carefully fill buckets with delicious honey. When the buckets are full, they leave the wax combs on the ground for the honeyguide. She digs in. Mmm, larvae!

Honey hunts like this one are the only way that many East African



A Hadza man gathers honey and honeycomb in a bucket to carry back home to the village.

tribes get honey. They don't keep beehives. Instead, each tribe has invented a different way of hunting with the honeyguide. Many tribes let the bird eat as much honeycomb

First, we'll take down these walls for a more contemporary open floor plan.



Lots of room for the honeycomb—wax structure that holds honey and eggs.



I'm thinking sunny yellows and orange tones to brighten it up.





When it's still in the honeycomb, honey is easy to eat with your hands. Yum!



as it likes after a hunt. But some, like the Hadza in Tanzania, only let the honeyguide eat a couple mouthfuls. They believe that this will keep the honeyguide hungry and ready to find more hives for them.

The honeyguide doesn't always start a honey hunt, either. In Mozambique, the Yao people have developed a call to tell the honeyguide when they're looking for a hive. With their tools in hand, they walk out on the grassland and shout *brrrrrr-hmmph!* Sometimes there's no answer. But most of the time a little bird zips over, eager to get going. Other tribes have a special whistle that the birds recognize.

As more people move to cities and work on farms, rather than hunting and gathering in the bush, there are fewer people who know how to go on a honey hunt. The honeyguide's territory is shrinking. But there are still tribes who love these smart little birds. They know that by working together, life's a little sweeter for everyone. 🐝

It's a great location, way out here in the bush—this wild area where few people live.



A perfect fixer-upper!



How did you ever find it?



Pedaling... lots of pedaling.

