

# *The* **KNOWLEDGE** *and SKILL of the* **WILD HARVESTER**





## What is this booklet about?

This book is about recognising wild harvesters of Honeybush for the important role that they have played, and continue to play, in the commercial development of a most remarkable South African tea. It highlights the crucial value of their local ecological knowledge, which they have freely shared and practically employed to the benefit of the entire value chain. Their intimate and highly respected knowledge of Honeybush species, and the environment in which they grow, quite simply underpins the sustainable sourcing of material from the wild. Of course, the benefits of such ecological knowledge are much broader, for in supporting responsible extraction of a handful of tea species there are collateral benefits for many plants that occur alongside.

Rapidly passing are the days when one could expect the national and provincial governments and their agencies to fully manage the environment on our behalf; rather, it is a responsibility that we all share as a nation if there is to be hope that future generations are to benefit to anything like the same extent as the present one. In this vein we can gratefully thank the harvesters of wild Honeybush for their various contributions. They are custodians that we need now and into the future; custodians whose contributions should be appropriately recognized and rewarded. This book is a small step towards this.

**Prof Neil Crouch**

SANBI, Bioprospecting Economy, Biodiversity Research, Assessment and Monitoring

## About Honeybush

Honeybush only grows in South Africa in Fynbos veld. There are 23 species of honeybush in the *Cyclopia* group, but only seven are used for tea production.

Wild harvesters mostly harvest Vleitee (*Cyclopia subternata*) or Bergtee (*Cyclopia intermedia*) with Bergtee especially favoured for its quality and taste.



## Wild harvesting

Wild harvesting is not an easy job. Wild harvesters go up into difficult terrain, where they cut the Honeybush plants and bundle it. From there they bring it down for processing to make Honeybush tea.



A lot of wild harvesters have been doing it for many years, with the skill and knowledge passed from one generation to the next. Before Honeybush became commercial and mostly an export product, families went up into the mountains to cut what they need for use at home.

Wild harvesters bring their knowledge of the local environment and conditions to their job. **By using and sharing this local ecological knowledge they are also stewards of the land and the Honeybush plant.**

## What knowledge do the wild harvesters have?

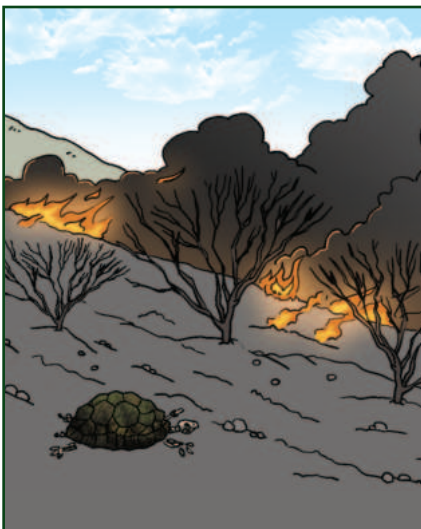
They know the land and where wild Honeybush grows. They know the weather of the area and the impact it can have on what they do.



They know how often and when the Honeybush has been harvested.



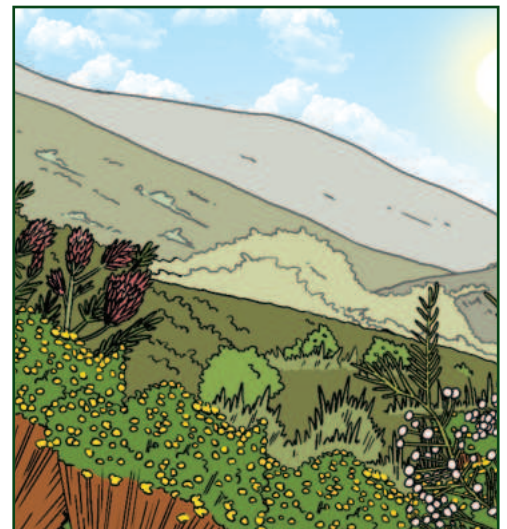
They know if there has been a fire or not.



They know when to harvest and when to give an area a break for the Honeybush to recover. They have a conservation mindset.



They know the ecosystem their Honeybush thrives in, including its companion plants.



*We know which plants are strong and we know which ones are tired. You can see it in the colour. If they asked us, we could tell them how the plant is doing. It's not just what it weighs.*

Griet Claasen

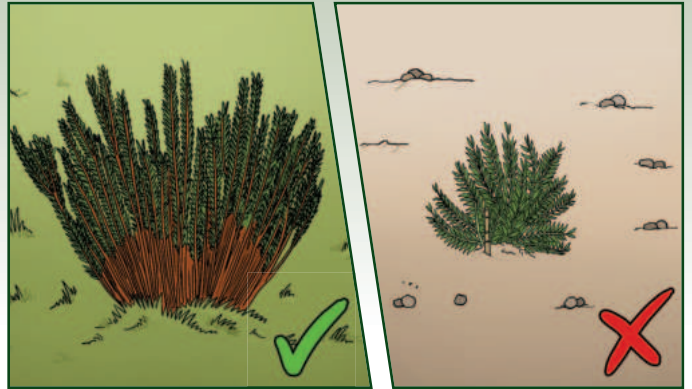


# From years of experience, wild harvesters know Honeybush and how to harvest it.

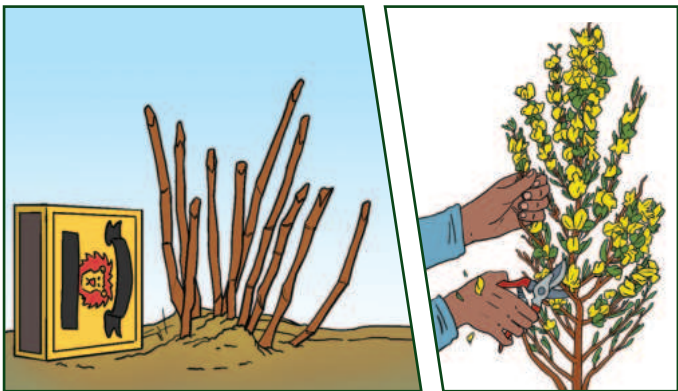
They know what an unhealthy plant looks like.



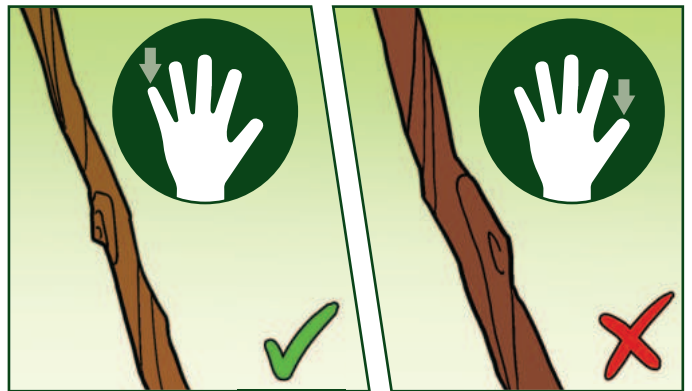
They can see when a plant is ready to be cut.



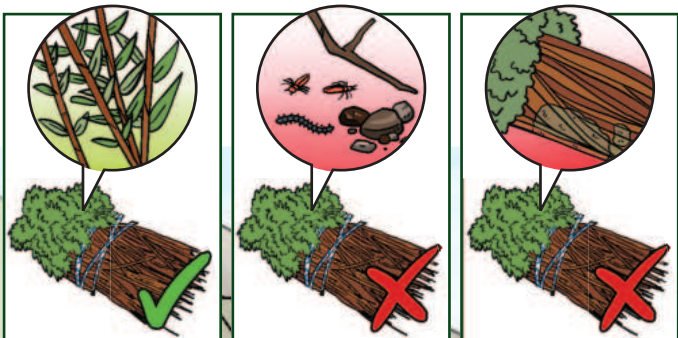
They know how far from the ground to cut depending on the type of tea.



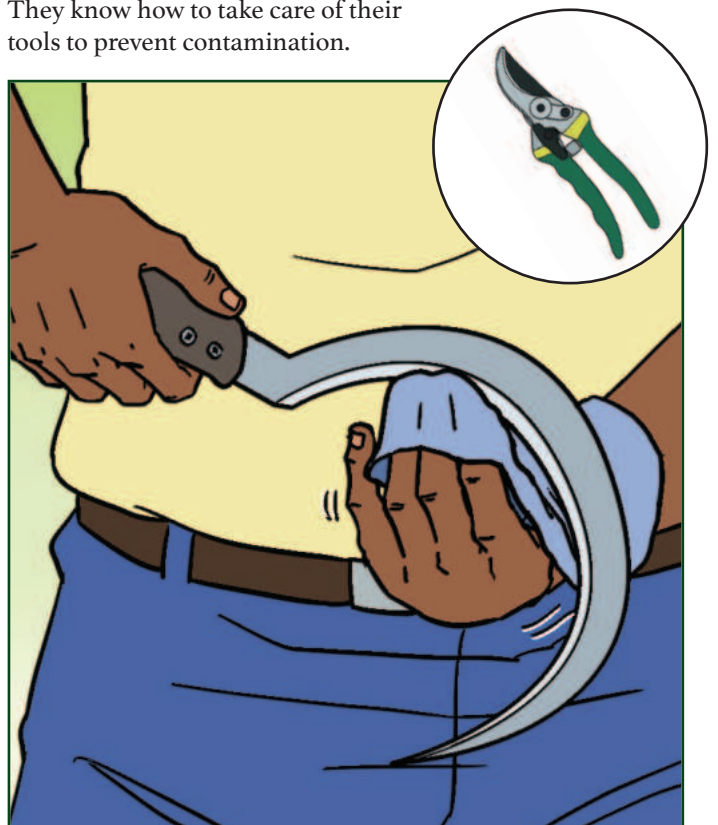
They know how thick the stems should be for efficient processing.



They deliver quality bundles, with less dirt, foreign objects and other plant species.



They know how to take care of their tools to prevent contamination.





## Wild harvesters and the sustainable harvesting guidelines



These guidelines were produced not only based on research and the best available science but also the knowledge and practices of harvesters and farmers that have experience in wild Honeybush harvesting.

The harvesters' local ecological knowledge helped to create this document that plays an important role in the sustainable harvesting and conservation of Honeybush. At the same time the document is also supported by science. It shows the value of stakeholders coming together and sharing knowledge in the best interest of the industry.



These guidelines help make sure that the harvesting of wild Honeybush does not affect the survival of the species. It helps us conserve biodiversity and use resources sustainably, now and into the future.



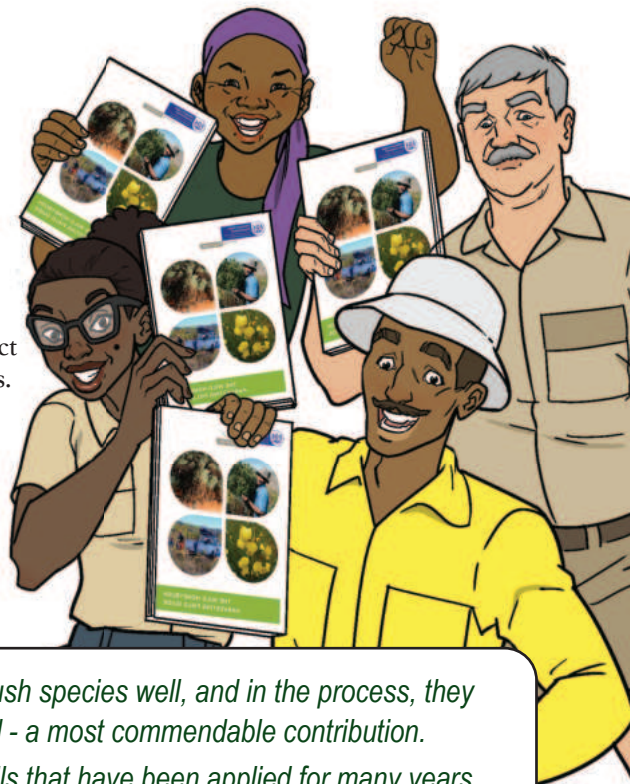
Prof. Neil Crouch



BETTER TOGETHER



THE WILD HONEYBUSH  
HARVESTING FIELD GUIDE



*Harvesters help manage a few Honeybush species well, and in the process, they benefit many other plants in the wild - a most commendable contribution.*

*Their knowledge reflects in practical skills that have been applied for many years and has recently been documented and incorporated in national harvesting and resource management guidelines. These guidelines have been endorsed by the Minister of the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, with their incorporation in the Biodiversity Management Plan for Honeybush Species.*

*For other biotrade species such as Cape aloe, Rooibos and Buchu we need similar such contributions from communities who hold pertinent and rich ecological knowledge. It is increasingly recognised both within South Africa and abroad that we need to develop new tools and approaches that help secure ecologically sustainable development involving the use of indigenous plant resources.*



## Why is sustainable harvesting important?

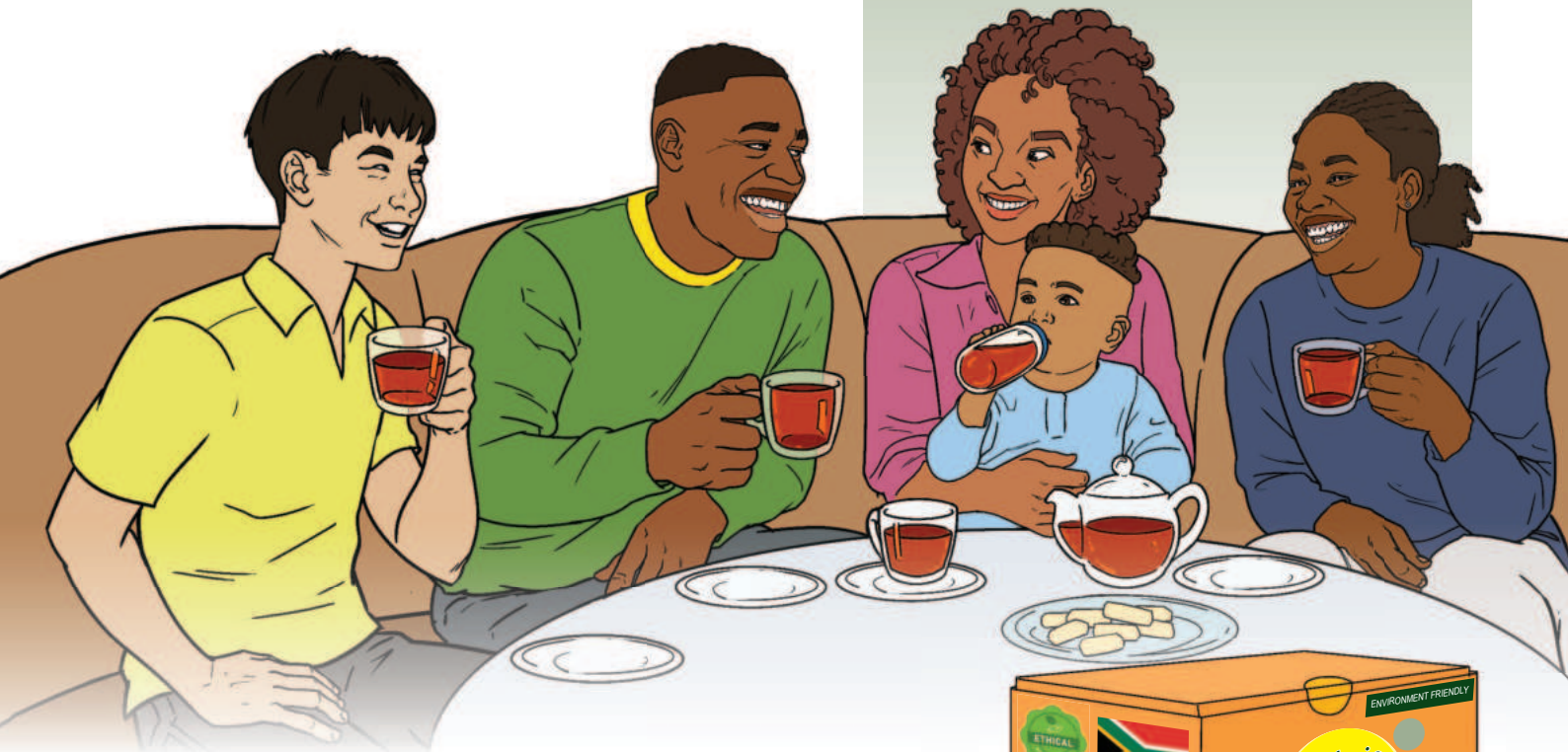
It's important to preserve the land and its biodiversity. Honeybush is part of the fynbos ecosystem. Like people, Honeybush thrives in its community.

Every element is needed to make sure the whole system is healthy and stays strong.



Overharvesting can affect the survival of the Honeybush plant and also damage the environment around it. Cultivation of certain Honeybush species helps to take the pressure off of the wild Honeybush. Those who plant, grow and nurture Honeybush plants are also using the local knowledge of wild harvesters to ensure they can create the best conditions for the plants.

It's important to buyers and customers that the tea was harvested using best practices and in sustainable ways. Sometimes this is a legal requirement from the country and often it is because customers also care for the environment and want to know what they do doesn't harm it.



**Responsible sourcing** in the market is about finding and selling products that have not negatively affected the environment and the communities they come from.





## The important role of wild harvesters

The Honeybush industry needs natural systems, like the land where Honeybush grows, to be well managed.



Wild harvesters are key to that. They know the land, the plant and how harvesting and conservation work together. This is knowledge they built up through their history and experience.



Their practices help prevent overharvesting and ensure conservation of the ecosystem.



They help assure the quality of the Honeybush tea product from start to finish. All of this makes the market and the end customer happy as they can say the product tastes good but also that it was 'responsibly sourced'.



*You seek the honeybush tea in the wild, for the scent of the honeybush tugs at your life thread. Honeybush is medicine. I harvest it for people in the community - many use it for healing. What I do is rooted in nature. It's a simple, natural way of life.*

*Edward George Bernado*

This document is part of a series of knowledge products produced by the BioInnovation Africa (BIA) project in South Africa. Other BIA knowledge products and biotrade resources can be found on the joint website of BIA, ABioSA and the ABS Capacity Development Initiative.

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