



**CORRESPONDENCE between RICHARD HILL and CHARLES DARWIN
About Jamaica's Bees**

<http://sitekreator.com/my.history/beekeeping.html>

Charles Darwin

In 1859 an exchange of correspondence took place between Richard Hill and Charles Darwin about bees in Jamaica, especially the indigenous bees.

Letter: From Richard Hill to Charles Darwin:

Spanish Town, Jamaica

10th January 1859

My dear Sir,

I shall not fail to attend to all your requests relative to the naturalized hive and the indigenous Bee,—their honey and their honey comb— A friend who has a fine apiary will put up for me the specimens of the broodless cells you require.

Our *Melipona* I think on examination will be found to be different from that of Mexico. Living specimens were sent to Sir William Jardine by M^r Edward Chitty, now of the King's Bench Walk Temple. Through him you will probably obtain some specific intelligence relating to those native bees. The honey cells are sacklets, the honey dark coloured, and the wax nearly as deep in tint as obsidian. We have a log in the Museum of our Society of Arts containing a living hive at work, and if I do not possess myself of what you desire early, I shall be able from this stock to get for you Specimens

We have the *Xylocopa teredo* [carpenter bee] of Lansdowne Guilding.— I shall see if I can procure these. They are rather scarce, but come occasionally under the notice of the Logwood cutters.

I shall enquire generally what are our variety of Social and Solitary Apidæ and let you know. Westwood I see gives us the *Apis grossa*, but I have never seen it. We have a rose-leaf-cutter bee, lining its nest with circular cuttings from the Rose as the *Megachile*, but in what respect it is specifically distinguished I do not know. All this ignorance serves to render your enquiry very interesting, and therefore a labour of pleasure.

With much respect, I remain

My dear Sir,

Very faithfully your obedient Servant

Richard Hill

Charles Darwin Esq^e FRS.'



Apis grossa

Much later in the year Darwin expressed his gratitude for specimens Hill had sent him:

Letter From: Charles Darwin to Richard Hill:



Darwin's Study, Down House

Down, Bromley, Kent

August 8th, 1859

My dear Sir,

I have delayed answering your last kind note, until I got the hive (after some delay owing to mercantile forms) from Mr. Bishop. Mr. B. has been very obliging and when you see Mr. Wilkie pray give him my best thanks. The quality of honey was astonishing and so excellent that honey for him then repaid the cost of the hive.

The combs were rather too crowded and old (till all fully formed) to be very good for measurement; yet I can clearly see that the cells are larger (in about proportion of 60 to 51) than the cells of British combs. This is a curious fact (and shows that Latraille was correct): the size of the cells of European cells are so uniform that I think that I remember that some wild [?] man proposed them as a standard unit of measurement! The walls of the cells are, I am almost sure, considerably thicker than in our cells; but I have as yet made no precise measurements.

Now these facts made me anxious to obtain $\frac{1}{2}$ dozen dead Bees and perhaps 2 or 3 drones: until you oblige me by trying to get them from Mr. Wilkie's Stock, and send them in box in letter, as they could not weigh one $\frac{1}{2}$ oz. It is possible that the species may be different, or that our species may have grown larger under your magnificent climate.

Your letters have excited in me much interest about you, and I was quite delighted (if you will not think it impertinent in me to say so) to hear of all your varied accomplishments and knowledge, and of your higher attributes in the sacred cause of humanity. I am sure I feel grateful to you for all your kind assistance, and I beg leave to remain with sincere respects,

My dear Sir, Yours very faithfully,
(Sgd.) Charles Darwin

The Mr Wilkie mentioned in the letters will appear again in a later item:

Letter From: Richard Hill to Charles Darwin:

Spanish Town, Jamaica

November 26, 1859

My dear Sir,

I received your letter when our latter rains were setting in,—a lingering but not a heavy season. I was in consequence precluded from getting out to Mr. Wilkie's Apiary for the specimens of Bees you desired to have. Could I have seen Mr. Wilkie, I should have obtained what you wanted readily, but he has been and still continues absent in a distant parish.

I now send you what may be acceptable until I am able completely to meet your wishes. There are in the box four workers and one drone. Mr. March, a naturalist very well known to Sir William Hooker,—from whom I procured these specimens, promises me a complete suite from the Queen downwards. He has been searching over his Farm in the Salt Pond plain for our Meliponas, but without success. He intends to supply me with a joint of a tree containing the Sacklets,—when he finds a hive.

With best regards believe me my dear Sir,

Your very obedient Servant

Richard Hill

The last letter was written in Spanish Town two days after Charles Darwin's "On the Origin of Species" was published in London.



King's House, Spanish Town