



AUGUST 2010

# Taranaki Beekeeping Club



## WHAT'S ON IN TARANAKI

Greetings Fellow Beekeepers,

I will not be with you this month but have jotted down a few notes that may be of some use to the newer members of the Club.

It is good to see some sunny days after the damp cold frosty days of July. By now colonies will be enlarging their brood nest using stored honey and pollen from Gorse and Tree Lucerne, so the new season is underway..

Sometime soon, check the quantity of stores in the hive to make sure there is enough honey there for the enlarging family, even if it is wet for a fortnight. You must have at least three frames of honey on hand at all times in the hive and currently there should be at least six. If you haven't, then you should feed sugar syrup. The syrup should be a pound per pint, warmed to dissolve and fed at night or in the evening to prevent robbing from starting. It is much easier to prevent than to try to stop bees from robbing each other's hive and the production of a free meal at this time of the year is guaranteed to produce a frenzy of bees around the entrance but if fed late in the evening most of the bees are in their hives concerned with other matters and the excitement will have died down considerably by the following morning.

The Willow is the next source of nectar, followed by the fruit trees (some of the plums are in bloom already.)

Do your Spring inspections for AFB and Spring Clean your hive before the end of this month- scraping the frames of Propolis and Burr Comb, both being valuable and saleable hive products. Move old and black combs to the outer side of the super for later removal when empty.

Don't disturb the brood nest more than necessary, (except for your inspection) and if you detect dampness – do something about it.!

Early swarms can occur in September so be aware that if you want to ensure that your workforce stays in the hive, you will have to start checking for Queen Cells every fortnight on a fine warm windless day.

Now is the time to assess your "strip" situation as the Varroa Mite will be increasing in your Brood Nest as your numbers increase – do a 'strip' test to see what the numbers are like and whether you should be starting treatment now. If you are going "Organic" be especially careful to make sure that the treatment is working. There have been some spectacular failures by some club members.

Take care and I hope to see you all at the Sept meeting.  
Adrian.



**Next club meeting**  
**16th August 2010**  
**In the PLUNKET ROOMS**  
**6.30pm**  
Next to New World Supermarket  
**Third Monday of every month**

## **Beekeepers fear the lifting of a ban on Australian honey imports will spell the end of their industry.**

SCIENCE GOLIATH Albert Einstein once predicted the end of the world would come a few years after the last bee has died.

Now Kiwi beekeepers are forecasting a similarly bleak scenario here as they face the prospect of Australian honey being imported into New Zealand for the first time in decades. The beekeepers fear the importation of Australian honey – some possibly mixed with honey from China – will bring with it diseases that could wipe out our bee population and, as a result, cripple the agriculture industry.

Leading Kiwi beekeeper Russell Berry is happy to echo Einstein's prediction, taking a near doomsday approach to the threat posed by new diseases. He predicts that any attack on our bee population would be "worse than [a] foot-and-mouth" outbreak.

Berry runs the Rotorua arm of the massive Arataki Honey business and is chairman of the Honey Bee Pollination Association. His bleak vision is not such a far-fetched scenario. Bees are in rapid decline in the United States and Britain, falling prey to a variety of diseases which are compounded by a lack of genetic diversity and some poor farming practices.

In the US, colony collapse disorder (CCD) has resulted in entire hives simply disappearing, while in the UK bee numbers have plummeted so far the government has set aside 10 million (\$21.6m) to investigate the problem.

Berry is adamant New Zealand is well-placed to withstand such catastrophic bee deaths – as long as biosecurity is up to scratch – and by that he means keeping imported honey out of New Zealand.

The main disease afflicting New Zealand bees is the varroa mite, which eats the larvae of bees, but apiarists are able to control it with pesticides – so far. Berry fears New Zealand hives will be decimated if Australian honey is allowed into the country, saying it could bring with it Israeli acute paralysis virus, European foulbrood, *Nosema ceranae* and *P.alvei*, all of which could wreak havoc on our relatively disease-free bees.

The argument is that, if you buy Australian honey to put on your toast, that honey will gradually find its way into the environment and Kiwi bees will be drawn to it, picking up any diseases carried in that honey.

And yes, there are ways of killing disease such as heat-treating honey, but there is no certainty it is fully effective. A pilot survey is being done now by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (Maf) to see if there is evidence of these pests, and others, in New Zealand. If no sign of these diseases is found during the pilot survey, a full-scale "proof-of-absence" survey will be carried out next year.

Daniel Paul, chief executive of the National Beekeepers' Association, wants to know why we even need Australian honey here. "Why do we want honey from Australia in New Zealand? We produce enough honey for ourselves and we export our excess, whereas Australia doesn't produce enough honey for its own purposes."

Agriculture Minister David Carter, however, said the bee industry was "overly pessimistic" and suggested there was a degree of protectionism at work.

"The industry is genuinely worried but my job, and Maf's job, is to determine what is genuine fear around biosecurity versus emotional pressure around the competitive element of another product on New Zealand shelves."

Carter argues from a position of fair trade. "We are an export nation and we want fair access to global markets and, in this case, Australia is saying we want fair access for honey and we say we are investigating the biosecurity risks."

Paul worries the commitment to free trade will come at a huge cost long term if diseases are introduced. "You think what would happen if we get diseases that undermine our bee population. If you get rid of bees in this country don't think about exporting anything because there will be bugger all to export."

"We're thinking about short to medium-term trade issues and we need to consider longer-term strategic issues."

Here Carter agrees with the beekeepers, admitting that the introduction of new diseases could severely damage the economy – if bees are decimated, there will be less pollination of key crops such as kiwifruit and stone fruit.

"Bees are absolutely vital to New Zealand and I accept that point. And yes, two of the diseases they are worried about are particularly serious and we are free of these diseases.

"But no import health standard is developed in a light-minded fashion.

"Our primary concern is to keep New Zealand as disease-free as possible, but not to the extent that we are putting up barriers to

importation that haven't been established on sound science. Maf will have to have a high degree of confidence that the introduction of imported honey won't necessarily lead to the introduction of these diseases."

In a speech to the National Beekeepers' Association last month, Carter warned beekeepers to prepare themselves for "the different possible outcomes".

"If the scientific evidence is against you, continuing a battle to keep Australian honey out will be a challenge. The industry will need a strategy to compete on the domestic market, which will be a whole new ball game for you."

Berry says that if Australian honey is allowed in, he will pack up his business.

"Hopefully it does not happen. If we do let in Australian honey, I'll wind up and sell because otherwise I'll go broke. If we have bee diseases come in, I think half the beekeepers in New Zealand will go into receivership.

"I am very concerned that the government, be it Labour or National, is more concerned about free trade than they are about our environment.

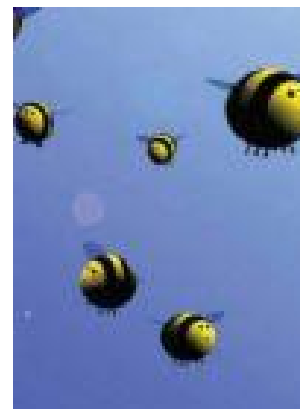
"I don't think our minister really understands that if we bring in more diseases our hives will go down dramatically. If our hive numbers drop by half, we won't have too much kiwifruit, stone fruit or clover... in the long run it will be more serious than foot-and-mouth."

It's estimated that about a third of the world's food supply relies on bee pollination. In the UK, the decline in bee numbers is estimated to have cost the British economy around \$1 billion.

"It's very worrying," says Berry. "I was in England and Scotland recently and people in the street all know about the shortage of bees and what effect it is having on their economy – it's absolutely critical we stop bee diseases getting into New Zealand." In the US, a third of all commercial honeybee colonies have died each year since 2006.

One theory is that the bees were stressed by an almost sweat-shop approach to pollination, where tens of thousands of hives would be transported by truck from one destination to another, each stop featuring just a single crop – almonds one month, cherries the next, apples after that.

During each assignment, the millions of bees feed on row after row of the same crop; there are so many bees and they don't get the variety of nutrition they needed. Under-fed and overworked, they are more susceptible to disease. Berry has witnessed that type of intensive pollination and argues one of the reasons New Zealand has not been hit badly by diseases is because we have a decent level of genetic diversity and farming practices that are 10 years ahead of the US.



"You have to work with nature and bend a little bit where you can; the Americans tend to fly directly into nature. They complain about colony collapse disorder, but if you put so many hives in one place you would go backwards. They were not working with nature, they were working against nature. They were stressing bees and they've got diseases we have not got, so a combination of those results in colony collapse disorder."

### THE STORY SO FAR

Maf developed requirements for Australian honey imports, known as an Import Health Standard (IHS), in 2006, but it was legally challenged by New Zealand's bee industry and quashed by the Court of Appeal.

Subsequently, legislation was passed reinstating the IHS, but requiring a suspension on imports until an independent review panel had reported on the issue to Maf, and Maf had made a determination on whether any amendment to the rules was required.

A decision from Maf on the biosecurity risk is still a year away, but already there seems some evidence *P. alvei* has been identified in soil here, but not in the bee population. Agriculture Minister David Carter says the possible introduction of *P. alvei* "was one of the industry's major concerns raised to the independent review panel process".

### AN APPLE SWEETENER?

Beekeeper Russell Berry is quite happy to compare apples with honey.

"They [Maf] would rather run the risk of bringing in diseases providing we can export apples to Australia," Berry told the Star-Times, inferring a trade-off.

But Agriculture Minister David Carter says that is "categorically wrong".

It's been 85 years since New Zealand was allowed to export apples to Australia because it alleges our apples would introduce fireblight to Australia.

New Zealand is now close to winning that long-running battle, with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) expected to soon ratify a draft of the report, which came down in favour of New Zealand.

In all the time we've been banned from sending apples there, they've been unable to get honey in here and now, on the back of a win for the Kiwi apple growers, it looks like Aussie honey producers might finally get their way. But Carter denies any link.

"There is no link between apples and honey the only link is we argue all around the world that our products should be able to go into these countries based on an argument around scientific risk. We feel so strongly about that we have taken our near neighbours to the WTO and we await that decision in the near future.

"We've long said to the Australians we want you to make a decision to let our apples in on science, not on emotion, so we can't continue to demand that standard from Australians and

then try to demand a different standard for honey."

### Facts

New Zealand bee products are sought after worldwide. Around 12,375 tonnes of honey is produced annually, with almost half exported. Exports of honey alone are valued at around \$71 million, including \$4m of premium organic honey. Roughly one-third of everything we eat is pollinated by bees. Up to 88,000 hives are needed for pollination nationwide. Nearly all beekeepers in the North Island, and more than half in the South Island, provide hives for pollination. The number of beekeepers has declined dramatically over the last 10 years. About 2600 New Zealanders keep bees, with the 287 biggest beekeepers managing 96% of registered hives.

*Source: National Beekeepers Association*

## Amazing facts about about honeybees

In Summer, a typical hive of honeybees might contain:-

1	queen
250	drones
20,000	female foragers
40,000	female house-bees
5,000 to 7,000	eggs
7,000 to 11,000	larvae being fed
16,000 to 24,000	larvae developing into adults in sealed cells

## Did you know that...?

Ten years ago, it was estimated there were around 65 million hives worldwide producing nearly 1 million tonnes of honey each year.

Throughout the ages, bees have been used as weapons. Beehives were dropped or thrown at opposing soldiers. As recently as 1915 in Africa, the German army used bees to delay the advance of British troops.

Because of its antiseptic properties, during the first world war honey was used to dress soldiers wounds. In the second world war it was used until penicillin became available. Honey is still claimed to be good for treating open sores and ulcers when used in a poultice.

The largest recorded number of stings is 2,243 to a 30 year old man in Zimbabwe - he survived the ordeal.

The largest recorded honeycomb measured 2.25 m from end to end.

In the past, people thought that, dead bees mixed with honey and anointed on a bald head, made the hair grow back.

Honey has been used to preserve human corneas (parts of eyes) for transplants.

For centuries, bees have been used to guard valuables. In India bandits used the large Asian honeybee *Apis Dorsata* to guard loot near mountain caves.