

ISSUE 12, JULY 2020

# APIARIST'S ADVOCATE

News, Views & Promotions - for Beekeepers - by Beekeepers



**Focus on  
Training**  
Fees Free Funding  
Makes Apiculture  
Training More  
Accessible Than Ever

# Focus on Training

This issue we take a closer look at apiculture training available in New Zealand. In the wake of the country's national lockdown, recognised training schemes have never been more available to beekeepers or more in demand. In this feature we aim to give an overview of the training options available and highlight success stories. So, as a beekeeper, employer, want-to-be-beekeeper or if you just know someone who might wish to study apiculture, take a look around and contact any of the training providers for more information on their courses.

**With a recession looming in New Zealand, unemployment is on the rise and the government has acted – putting in place funding to fully cover all apprenticeships until 2022 as well as certificates and diplomas in targeted, high-demand industries.**

Apiculture is one such industry and training providers have reported increased interest for beekeeping courses this year, due to two major factors. The national lockdown, implemented in March,

caused job losses and resulted in more people seeking to retrain, while the apprenticeship funding announcement in May has also greatly increased interest in training as it looks set to reduce the financial burden.

New Zealand is well served to provide apiculture training, with a variety of institutes offering NZQA registered courses, primarily at Level 3 and below, while an official apprenticeship scheme was established last year to work with employers to provide Level 3 and 4 beekeeping qualifications to those already working in the industry.

The New Zealand Apprenticeship in Apiculture puts the industry's training on a par with trade industries which have long offered apprenticeships. It was developed in conjunction with industry body Apiculture New Zealand, is administered through Primary ITO and delivered through on the job training and in conjunction with Pacific Coast Technical Institute.

Outside of the apprenticeship, numerous other training providers are well scattered around the country. Some of these have long provided apiculture training via correspondence, while the fast evolving nature of online training has seen that become a suitable medium for the theory side of some programs.

All up, in 2020 the combination of nationally recognised training options available today are in stark contrast to what has been available to generations of beekeepers since the introduction of the first hives to New Zealand in 1839. The apiculture industry has changed dramatically throughout those 181 years and will continue to do so, with beekeeper training now a growing part of that evolution. 🐝



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**WHERE:** Balclutha & online, by distance.

**WHEN:** September 2020 – May 21, or extramurally anytime.

**WHAT:** New Zealand Certificate in Apiculture (Level 3).

**HOW:** Via blended delivery, online and with nine face-to-face workshops.

**WHO:** Anyone wanting to get in to beekeeping.



# Apprenticeships Push Apiarists Higher

The New Zealand Apprenticeship in Apiculture entered its second year of existence in 2020 and, even before government announced funding for such training would be fully funded, uptake was strong. Now, as New Zealand moves out of lockdown and into a recovery where apprentices can train for free, it looks set to play an increasingly important role.

**The difference between the NZ Apprenticeship in Apiculture and other apiculture training offered in New Zealand is a requirement to train on the job and at a higher level, Kellie Rose of Primary ITO says.**

"In the past you had (Certificate in Apiculture) Level 3 training within the polytechnic system, but when we established the apprenticeship, with the assistance of Apiculture New Zealand, the aim was to get up to Level 4 space. That way it was alongside where most of the other trades sit," Rose says.

"Having sign off at Level 4 means a person has good understanding and can do stuff without being supervised. It is key to raise an industry to that Level 4 space."

Autumn 2019 saw an inaugural intake of about 100 apprentices, while 80 more signed up in 2020.

The full apprenticeship is carried out over two years, with beekeepers employed in commercial operations completing Level 3 in year one and then Level 4 in year two. Some trainees can go straight to Level 4 if they have sufficient beekeeping experience.

Like any apprenticeship, there is an element of training and then sign-off by an experienced supervisor in the workplace as well as some theory work. First year trainees would normally gather for a three day block course and second year apprentices a five day block course, provided through Pacific Coast Technical Institute in May or June. However, because of restrictions on travel and gatherings in 2020, that classroom component had to be moved online.



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## PACIFIC COAST TECHNICAL INSTITUTE

PCTI offer a funded, practical Level 3 and 4 apiculture programmes nationwide, while also delivering block courses for those undertaking the New Zealand Apiculture Apprenticeship. The institute has just re-written its Pest and Disease, Bee Behaviour and Botany programmes, making them "cutting-edge" says PCTI head of primary industries and commercial beekeeper Chris Fraser. "It's really important that our students are operating with the latest information and tools to protect our country's apiculture interests at all levels. Differential diagnosis of hive conditions is a critical approach, as both professional and hobbyist beekeepers are only as good as the weakest link." For Information on PCTI New Zealand Certificate in Apiculture Level 3 and 4 training, email Chris@pcti.co.nz or head to www.pcti.co.nz.

- WHERE:** NZ Wide  
**WHEN:** From mid July, part-time 34 weeks  
**WHAT:** New Zealand Certificate in Apiculture (Levels 3 & 4).  
**HOW:** Practical workshops and online learning.  
**WHO:** Both beginners and those in beekeeping work.

"There is nothing that will replace getting together in a classroom. We had to do it though and it has worked, surprisingly well actually, but it is not ideal. We can't wait to get back to the block courses next year," Rose says.

Since the government's announcement of apprenticeship funding, Primary ITO have been fielding plenty of interest from employers looking to take advantage of the program and train their beekeepers. However, given the timing of that interest, there is a balancing act which must be played out, Rose says.

"The ideal time to enrol is autumn so you can come on board and do your theory over winter, then hit the ground running in spring.

"We don't want people to miss out on funding, but at the same time we don't want to set people up with training which is not ideal. At the end of the day, if the government is going to give out funding for people to train then we are going to do everything we can to make it work for them and the employers."

So far the program has done just that, worked for both beekeepers and employers. It has drawn people from companies with some of the largest workforces in New Zealand apiculture to two person operations, Rose says.

"Whether you are a small band or a big employer, it does not matter, the apprenticeship fits." 🐝



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**The New Zealand Certificate in Apiculture (Queen Bee Rearing) (Level 4),** will enable you to rear queen bees for a commercial operation or to operate your own queen bee rearing operation.

Both of these programmes are offered via a mix of on-line learning and practical hands-on weekend workshops, at a variety of locations across New Zealand.

For more information or to Enrol visit [www.central.op.ac.nz/study/apiculture](http://www.central.op.ac.nz/study/apiculture) or call 0800 765 9276.



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## OTAGO POLYTECHNIC

Otago Polytechnic is accredited to deliver apiculture Level 3, 4 and queen bee rearing Level 4 courses and is the only tertiary provider in NZ accredited to do so. With trainers from the far North to Southland we deliver Level 3 and 4 apiculture courses across NZ. Our programmes, which are delivered via online learning and hands-on weekend courses for NZ Certificate in Apiculture Level 3 and Queen Bee Rearing Level 4, start in September. We offer the apiculture apprenticeship qualification of Level 3 (2020) and Level 4 (2021). Course fees, normally \$1500, are free to those enrolling over the next 12 months. Enrol today at [www.central.op.ac.nz/study/apiculture/](http://www.central.op.ac.nz/study/apiculture/)

**WHERE:** Block courses at numerous locations & online components

**WHEN:** September 2020 – May 21

**WHAT:** New Zealand Certificate in Apiculture (Level 3) New Zealand Certificate in Apiculture (Queen Bee Rearing) (Level 4).

**HOW:** Via blended delivery, online and with block courses in locations around NZ.

**WHO:** Anyone wanting a start in beekeeping, expand their skills or develop queen-rearing ability.



# Getting a Start Through Training

Numerous polytechnic and training facilities offer Level 3 apiculture training in New Zealand and, with skilled foreign beekeepers likely to be denied entry into New Zealand in the short to mid-term, beekeeping graduates could find themselves more sought after.

**One such student currently undertaking beekeeping training via polytechnic is Jason Monsall, studying Level 3 Certificate in Apiculture through NorthTec at their Kaikohe, Northland, campus.**

While he has long seen beehives on family land in Northland, Monsall says actually opening a hive was a new experience when he began at NorthTec in February.

"It is super interesting once you get in there and remove the stereotypes people have about bees and insects. They are more in depth and not as simple as you think they might be," he says.

"I ask heaps of questions. I am really curious."

Monsall, who has more than 20 years' experience as a chef, says he is still not sure if he will be one of those pursuing a career

in beekeeping when he graduates in December. He is combining his apiculture study with a Level 3 Certificate in Small Business Management to broaden his knowledge base and keep his options open.

Like many of the training programmes offered in New Zealand, NorthTec's apiculture courses offer a mix of theory and practical learning.

The national lockdown caused some disruptions, but Monsall says his training provider was very supportive and provided each of the four students in his course with a Chromebook to carry out study. Then, in his case, they went even further.

"We got in to a few hives before Covid hit and then once we dropped down a few levels NorthTec actually arranged to have a hive dropped off at my house. So I have been able to look through my own hive."

While he has learnt plenty inside and outside the classroom on his course, Monsall says it is the ability to go through a hive both by himself and also with a tutor which has helped him a lot.

"You can read all you like, but if you don't put your head in a hive you are not going to learn a lot," he says. 🐝



## NORTH TEC

Are you looking for a career in beekeeping? Perhaps even wanting to learn how to run your own beekeeping business? You can learn all the basic skills required for a successful start in apiculture with a mix of theory, technical skills and practical work, while undertaking conjoining study to gain the knowledge to be able to run a small business. Our mix of programmes are ideal if you're new to the industry and want to acquire some fundamental knowledge before pursuing a future in beekeeping. With NorthTec you can gain the qualifications of New Zealand Certificate in Primary Industry Skills (Beekeeping) (Level 2), New Zealand Certificate in Apiculture (Level 3), New Zealand Certificate in Business (Introduction to Small Business) (Level 3).

**WHERE:** Kaitaia and Kaikohe campuses.

**WHEN:** July 2020 and February 2021 intakes.

**WHAT:** We offer two Certificates pertaining to apiculture: New Zealand Certificate in Primary Industry Skills (Beekeeping) (Level 2), New Zealand Certificate in Apiculture (Level 3).

**HOW:** In person, practical and classroom learning.

**WHO:** Anyone wishing to learn the fundamentals of beekeeping.

# Expanding the Knowledge Base

With thousands of hives and more than 20 staff to tend to them, Taylor Pass Honey Company has long understood the importance of upskilling their beekeepers. The South Island company helped seven of their beekeepers take up the New Zealand Apprenticeship in Apiculture in year one of the scheme and now have nine beekeepers involved. Already, apiary manager Matt Goldsworthy says they are reaping rewards.

"From the start we wanted to focus on developing great New Zealanders and the apprenticeship gave us the opportunity to offer something that was comparable to other trades with both onsite practical learning and the endorsement of NZQA standards," Goldsworthy says.

The knowledge transfer across a team of beekeepers which apprenticeship training is bringing is benefitting Taylor Pass Honey the apiary manager says.

"A few of the beekeepers who are not on the apprenticeship scheme have learnt a lot just from talking to those who are. There has been some good sharing of knowledge across the team.

"Sometimes the apprentices who come through end up having more knowledge than the much more experienced beekeepers.

Even I have learnt some stuff out of it and, no matter what level of beekeeping you are at, you will learn something new."

Taylor Pass Honey are based in Marlborough, but have a second operations base and hives in Central Otago.

"One of the biggest benefits is that it brings a bit of theory to what we are doing," Goldsworthy explains.

"Beekeepers are learning we do things not just because it is what we do, there is actually a reason why we are doing it. It answers those 'why?' questions and puts facts and science behind it, rather than just old wives' tales."

Beekeepers can carry out the theory portion of the program online or in hard-form via correspondence, while gaining experience in the hives at work. Sign-off of work is carried out by a beekeeper with at least eight years of experience and the necessary moderation qualification.

While the benefits to the employer of a more skilled workforce are fast becoming apparent at Taylor Pass Honey, the beekeepers themselves also gain qualification to point to.

"That is a big thing for some of these guys which they otherwise never would have had. Most beekeepers do not have officially recognised qualifications. Some of them are getting set up to have not only good experience, but with a qualification under their belt. It gives them a bit of credibility," Goldsworthy says.

He believes all employers should be considering introducing beekeepers to the apprenticeship.

"Where you can, big or small, we recommend it. Even if you are big and only put a couple of beekeepers through it, you get that wealth of knowledge spread across your teams and we are building depth and knowledge across our whole industry." 🐝

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**WHERE:** Whanganui, Hastings & Palmerston North (full-time), or part time at more than a dozen locations.

**WHEN:** From August 2020, full time 26 weeks, part-time 40 weeks.

**WHAT:** New Zealand Certificate in Primary Industries (Apiculture) Level 2 & 3.

**HOW:** On-site training

**WHO:** Beekeeping beginners



# Loss of Foreign Beekeepers a Concern



Employers of migrant beekeepers could be left scrambling to find workers this spring if, as expected, New Zealand's border remains closed to foreign nationals.

**Many beekeeping operations rely on skilled foreigners to tend to their hives through the spring, summer and autumn months, employed on temporary work visas. Some of these beekeepers have been allowed to remain in New Zealand over winter, with an eye to them being in place when the beekeeping season begins again in August and September (as detailed in the June issue of *Apiarist's Advocate*).**

However, many of the workers who left New Zealand to return to their homeland at the completion of the 2019-20 season, and were expecting to return later in the year, could be unable to enter the country.

Apiculture New Zealand (ApiNZ) chief executive Karin Kos says they have been in contact with Immigration New Zealand over the issue, but the chances of any workers being allowed entry is slim at this stage.

"The reality is, there are a lot of restrictions and the government has pretty much said that the bar is set really high for exceptions to the border restrictions. So, I think it is going to be very difficult for employers to bring migrant workers into the country. The expectation is that it probably won't happen this year," Kos says.

ApiNZ has been contacted by several employers who are concerned at the potential void left by the absence of foreign workers.

"Some employers do have staff on the ground and are trying to recruit other New Zealanders, but it is not easy. So I think there will be pressures on staffing entering the new season," Kos says.

Around 200 migrant workers came to New Zealand to work in apiculture last year, but the total number of beekeepers who remained in the country at the end of the season cannot be confirmed, Kos says.

While the likelihood of a reduction in border restrictions being eased was reduced by the discovery of new cases of Covid-19 entering the country in June, Kos says ApiNZ is doing what they can to find solutions.

"We are still working on it. The beekeeping companies I am talking to are saying they are constantly talking with Immigration. We are talking to them as well, asking for any updates, or if there are changes from government, then we want to know. They understand the issue."

Foreign workers have formed much of the workforce at some of New Zealand's biggest beekeeping companies in recent seasons, with Filipino beekeepers the most numerous of the various nationalities. However, Kos says she expects the border restrictions to have an effect across a wide range of apiculture businesses and with workers from many nations.

"It is not just bigger companies, there are some smaller companies who employ migrants, and not just Filipinos, there are some people come in from Eastern Europe, among others.

"I think everyone would prefer to employ New Zealanders, but the reality is, this industry has grown so much that employers have had to keep up with the growth."

Apiculture, as an industry, is not alone in its reliance on foreign workers and those who would usually call on migrant beekeepers should be making alternate plans for staffing, as best they can, Kos says.

"You have to work with what you have got, expecting that it is going to be difficult for migrant workers to enter the country. It is not just us as beekeepers, but all primary industries who are facing the issue. In fact, we are probably not as badly-affected as some of the other industries." 🐝



# Mite Monitor Gets a Go Ahead



*Alcohol-wash tests for mite-loading in hives will be carried out routinely by a group of Canterbury beekeepers as part of the recently funded Mite Monitor program.*

A dozen Canterbury beekeepers will be joining forces to counter the constant threat of varroa mite this season, by pooling data from mite-loading tests as part of a project that hopes to pave the way for a national program. The Mite Monitor concept recently received \$20,000 of funding, through AGMARDT, to launch a feasibility study. The goal? Proving that establishing a database and mapping program for varroa infestation levels will add value to commercial beekeeping operations.

The Mite Monitor concept has the potential to provide beekeepers all over New Zealand with a "live" and "dynamic" view of mite levels reported in neighbouring areas to their apiaries. Before that can happen though, the team behind the concept will seek to prove its worth in Canterbury using a manual data system.

"I'm so excited. I have been banging on about this idea for two or three years," Ashburton queen-breeder Rae Butler says.

Butler has long been undertaking regular mite-loading tests as part of her breeding program for varroa tolerant bees, which carry the varroa sensitive hygiene trait.

"I would see inconsistencies with mite loading, which pointed to reinvasions. It was obviously something that was going on regionally," Butler explains.

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The queen breeder saw the value in gaining a better understanding of the prevalence of the destructive mite in not only her own hives, but also areas in which she kept bees. It was going to take cooperation among neighbouring beekeepers though, a process which can be hard to bring about.

However, Butler found an ally in Martin Laas, research apiarist for Mid Canterbury's largest beekeeping operation, Midlands Apiaries. Together they progressed the idea and mustered up support from fellow beekeepers in their area.

They also gained the attention of Gertje Petersen, scientist at FutureBees NZ, an industry-science research group. Together they successfully applied to AGMARDT under the FutureBees banner.

With a dozen beekeepers on board and \$20,000 in funding on the way, Petersen will be employed to implement the Mite Monitor feasibility study this coming season.

Participating beekeepers will be required to undertake four coordinated rounds of alcohol-wash mite-loading tests, before and after spring varroa treatments and then before and after autumn treatments. Results will be recorded on a mites-per-100-bees basis, but only made available to all beekeepers in a "normalised" manner, such as a scoring system.

"We will keep GPS locations of every site and the idea is to produce a spread map after every testing period. At the end of the project year we should have four heat maps of varroa in the area," Petersen says.

This will give beekeepers a greater understanding of where reinfestation is most likely, allowing them to undertake appropriate prevention methods and more timely treatments.

By encouraging better mite-loading testing it will also help beekeepers determine the effectiveness of their current varroa management plan.

"We will use the information to form the basis of the bigger project to show how much value you can get out of not just monitoring mite loadings, but putting your data into context. That is the key part," Petersen says.

The approximately dozen participating beekeepers and companies own anywhere from two to 6000 hives, with Midlands Apiaries and Taylor Pass Honey Company among those.

Having those large companies on board is important in proving the practicality of carrying out a statistically significant number of tests on a large amount of hives, while offering an acceptable return for the companies' investment of time and labour, Petersen says.

Butler, who has long had the Mite Monitor idea, but not the means to make it happen, understands that during the feasibility study they are going to have to work with their supporting beekeepers as best they can.

"Hopefully we can do this at a level that is affordable to the beekeeper, because for many there is not a lot of money around at the moment," Butler says.

"The project has a small budget, but we will use it to the best of our ability. The beekeepers will not be paid for providing data, but we will help them with monitoring."

Butler says she has always wanted to do industry good and hence her excitement at the potential of Mite Monitor.

"The more data you can collect, the more informed decisions you can make. Hopefully then we can see positive results and can make it a more nationwide thing." 🐝



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# Finding Harmony in the Honey Industry



As a foundation Board member of Apiculture New Zealand (ApiNZ) Russell Marsh has spent the past four years advocating for beekeepers. Now, following a slimming down of the Board, he steps aside having helped bed-in the industry body, establish a positive relationship with government and oversee the implementation of a new manuka honey export standard. There were challenges at the management table too, and unification within the industry will be essential if it is to reach its potential, he believes.

**"Harmony" is the word that comes to mind when Marsh thinks back on his two terms of ApiNZ Board meetings.**

"That Board I have been involved with is pretty high calibre. We were never poles apart and when we had a challenging topic to discuss we would always come to a meeting of minds, once we had worked through the detail," Marsh says.

In the wake of Covid-19 and the national lockdown ApiNZ has decided to trim its 10-person management board to eight in the short term, with commercial beekeeping representative Marsh and Sean Goodwin from the market sector, stepping down.

"It has been blimmin' interesting for me, no doubt about it," Marsh says of his four years at the top table of the largest body representing New Zealand beekeepers.

"Joining an organisation like that and basically helping build it from ground zero up, I was happy to donate my time as someone within the industry, knowing, even if we only got things half right, it was going to be of benefit to me as a beekeeper."

Marsh is speaking from his Ettrick, Otago, base where he runs Marsh's Honey, a third generation business of around 1000 hives.

Both he and Goodwin will remain available to offer input to ApiNZ and the wider industry if seconded to do so. He also remains on the American Foulbrood Pest Management Plan Board as the ApiNZ representative, for the time being.

The Otago beekeeper and chartered accountant, who prior to beekeeping spent a decade in financial controller roles with Nestle NZ and Mainland Dairy, says he learnt a lot while on the ApiNZ Board. Industry politics provided the biggest learning curve, while

ApiNZ's strengthening relationship with government was a major highlight.

## STRONGER BY THE DAY

"It is essential, with discussion between a peak body and government, that you trust each other and have a decent relationship. It is critical to make progress and get decisions right," Marsh says.

With ApiNZ now in its fifth year of existence, having emerged following the restructuring of the National Beekeepers Association in 2016, Marsh has witnessed first-hand the dealings between the apiculture industry and central government.

"I am much more confident as I leave, that the relationship is getting stronger by the day,"

That cohesion extends to the Ministry for Primary Industries too, a department that has frequently drawn the ire of beekeepers.

"From where we started to where we are now, in terms of listening to each other and working together, we are so much further ahead and that is a real plus," Marsh says of dealings with MPI.

"It is easy to beat MPI up over detail at times, but during Covid-19 they looked after our industry well. They did a lot of work to make sure we would be open for business and able to look after the bees. That wasn't as straight forward as everybody thought. It moved really fast and we all think we were essential and would be allowed to operate, there was still a lot of work that went on behind the scene to make sure that was the case and we didn't have too much disruption."

## SINGING FROM THE WRONG SONGSHEET

While harmony might be found within the ApiNZ boardroom, as well as increasingly in their dealings with government and MPI, Marsh believes wrong notes are being struck elsewhere within beekeeping.

"There is still a void when you get down to the next level, in terms of industry relationships and the progress there. At some point we do need to have some unification at the grassroots level."

The third-generation beekeeper describes legal action taken at the changing of the manuka honey standard in 2018 and argument over a recent change to the AFB PMP Levy as intolerable.

"If that is where the industry is going to continuously go, and fund that type of thing to persuade government otherwise, we are not going to get ahead. That is the old-style industry politics, which, if you want harmonious relationships and you want to progress on a constructive basis, then that is no longer tolerable."

*Russell Marsh, stepping down from the ApiNZ Board but still heavily involved in the apiculture industry.*





The most damning lack of unification among beekeepers came when the honey-producers levy proposed by ApiNZ was voted down last year, but that discussion will come around again soon, he hopes.

### LEVY SETBACK

"Looking back now, there must be some beekeepers who are thinking twice when they consider the positives which could have come out of it," Marsh says of the rejected levy.

"If you have a look at the turnaround of the honey industry and resultant bubble bursting in the last two years, you have to say it would be quite nice to have something sitting there that would help the industry, finance some useful initiatives and help reduce the demise of parts of the industry."

Marsh believes unification within the industry is essential to establish future investment, and apiculture's lack of investment in itself through a levy is "a blight on the industry".

"When I look at the calibre of the Board and the construction of that levy proposal, that was as good as we were going to get. It was done professionally, we had everything in place in terms of what we thought the industry needed for the future, but once again it was undermined by industry politics and it swayed the result."

It would have been too difficult to ask the existing ApiNZ Board to tackle the levy dilemma again immediately, but Marsh says he hopes the idea can be tweaked and brought forward again.

He will not be directly involved in that potential task though and instead the Otago beekeeper is looking forward to focusing more on his own business operations.

### THREE SPEEDS

A "three-speed industry" is how Marsh describes the current state of New Zealand beekeeping.

Manuka honey producers are setting the pace, diverse businesses with some manuka honey fall in the middle, while those focusing entirely on non-manuka honey production are struggling.

Despite the struggles for some, Marsh is optimistic about the honey industry's future.


"We just have to deal with what we have in front of us. Sure, there is an oversupply of honey, but at the same time, when you look at how much honey we supply to the world, we still have good opportunities.

"I think we will continue to produce the good monoflorals we have got. We have such a good variety and range compared to the rest of the world and there are some unique factors about them."

As he steps back from his board position, Marsh still feels a calling to try and make improvements within the industry.

"Really the industry, in some parts, needs a helping hand commercially and some sort of consolidation basis. We have large companies that are doing well overseas, but we have a whole host of good community beekeepers who are struggling to get ahead. I suppose, given the work I have been doing and understanding the industry dynamics, I am in a reasonable position to team up to help out with some of that if I can.

"There seems to be a lot of doom and gloom, but when that happens you have to start shining a light on the opportunities.

"I'm sure they are there, it is just a matter of us lighting them up and getting a framework which makes them sustainable." 

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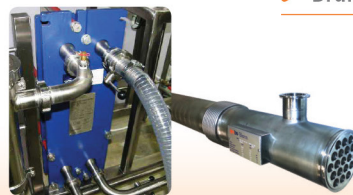


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# Bee-Questing Knowledge



It's BeeQuest by name bequest by nature for long-time beekeeper Andrew Stratford. Through two new ventures, he is looking to impart knowledge gained over almost three decades in the hives, honey sheds and offices of beekeeping operations big and small.

Beekeeping is in his blood and his journey through the hives has seen him cross paths with some leading figures in the New Zealand honey industry. Now, he believes, it is time to take what he has learned and assist others.

"I can remember buying manuka honey for \$3.80 a kilo," Stratford says of his early days in the honey industry.



Andrew Stratford

"That was pretty much standard price for it. It went up to \$4, then \$4.50 and everyone thought it was amazing."

That was the mid-1990s and Stratford, having returned from overseas in 1991 and taken up a position in the warehouse of his grandfather's Paengaroa honey company, had progressed to the position of a honey buyer. The company was Comvita, his grandfather the business co-founder Claude Stratford, and he would go on to work there for a total of 11 years before establishing his own beekeeping operation in 2002.

There followed a 10 year run at the head of the 1400-hive business, located on the central plateau of the North Island. Stratford and his business partners targeted manuka and various other monofloral honeys, as well as providing services for kiwifruit pollination and their own queen rearing.

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After selling up there Stratford launched another beekeeping business. It holds a name that, eight years after it was put in place, is strangely fitting to the next chapter of his career.

"BeeQuest. It is a play on words," he explains.

"To bequest is to leave something for the next generation. It's about looking after the bees, environment and our people."

### MYAPIARY ADVISORY SERVICE

Like most beekeepers, Stratford says he is always learning in the hives. That may be the case, but he has already accumulated a wealth of knowledge which could aid fellow beekeepers and their businesses.

With that in mind, he has teamed with management software specialists MyApiary to form an advisory service for beekeepers, which also calls on the expertise of chartered accountant Julian So.

Stratford says his role in the advisory service is primarily in beekeeping protocols and procedures.

"My experience in the last 10 years has been around manuka honey and learning how to get the best out of what you have got. With that comes knowledge on how not to run teams and how to run great teams."

Stratford's acumen has been called upon by one of the country's largest beekeeping operations in recent times, having been Oha Honey's national apiary manager from spring 2018 until this February.

He may have experience working for larger companies in Comvita and Oha Honey, but Stratford says smaller commercial operators could benefit from his knowledge too and that is why the formation of MyApiary Advisory Services appealed.

"There is a lot more money that guys could be earning out there if they learnt the tricks of the trade. There is potential, but a lot of guys don't ever ask the question. Or they think they are doing a good job, but they don't check themselves against others. There is a lot of competition for really good manuka sites, but there are still other opportunities if people know how to take them."

The advisory service is not all about making beekeepers money though. Stratford has experience attempting to manage bees, businesses, a marriage and six children and admits he has not always got that juggling act right. Thus, he understands the importance of establishing a healthy work-life balance.

"What I am trying to do is help companies that are struggling, but also help give people more free time. Life is about life as well."

### BEST PRACTICE BEEKEEPING

While MyApiary's advisory service allows Stratford to assist businesses on an individual level, Ecrotek Beekeeping Supplies have provided an avenue that can transfer his expertise to a wider audience.

Best Practice Beekeeping is a video learning series which is subscription based and sees Stratford, Dr Mark Goodwin and research associate Sarah Cross deliver tips and tricks to beekeepers. It was launched in June.

The videos aim to promote "best practice beekeeping methods that are not only based on proven, scientifically backed research, but are also supported by decades of practical experience".



## VIDEO LEARNING SERIES



*Dr. Mark Goodwin*



*Sarah Cross*



*Andrew Stratford*

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Stratford can deliver the later of those qualities, and not just inside the hive.

"We have done filming on standard operating procedures, and then on how to get the most out of your manuka honey, once it is in the drum. I will be doing a number of videos up until August that don't involve going into the hives too much," he says.

Come spring time the filming will move to the hives, a place Stratford has been familiar with from a young age.

#### GRANDFATHERLY GUIDANCE

While Claude Stratford was in the early stages of developing Comvita Honey in Northland during his grandson's formative years, Andrew Stratford's maternal grandfather also kept bees. They were closer to the family's Waikato home and stick in the now 55 year-old beekeeper's memory.

"I remember, very clearly, the beehives in the paddock next door. He had a tiny bee shed at the end of his carport in the garage where he would extract his honey. As kids with parents who did not have a lot of money that was the staple lunch – honey sandwiches," Stratford says.

It was with grandfather Claude's company where he got his start in the industry though, at a time when Dr Peter Molan's research into antibacterial qualities of manuka honey began to influence the New Zealand honey market.

"I got to learn what manuka honey tasted like and was involved in the early days of testing for UMF, in about 1996," Stratford says.

"We slowly got more and more familiar with what decent manuka honey looked and tasted like."

At that time Stratford was living in Paengaroa, not far from Comvita's base, and he began to keep about 40 hives of his own. His first mentor was neither of his grandfathers, but another man well known in Kiwi beekeeping circles – Cliff Van Eaton.

"Cliff was the one who taught me how to light a smoker. He taught me a bit and then I pretty much learned by asking different beekeepers questions. A lot of them were gracious, answered my questions and took the time to get me started."

Stratford says an inquisitive mind and "a lot of mistakes made once" has seen his beekeeping skills and knowledge grow through the years.

"I have had a lot of friends over the years who have been helpful and given me tips. Relationships are important in beekeeping. You can avoid a lot of problems by having good relationships with people."

That is where the two latest ventures come in, as his bee quest shifts to bequest-ing knowledge.

"There is opportunity for guys and girls to do better in their beekeeping, but they have to take them," Stratford says, adding "you have to be willing to be sharp and to change".

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# Stimulating Discussion



A desire to bring beekeepers together and share knowledge has seen a series of fortnightly online discussion groups, hosted by FutureBees NZ, gain encouraging early support. The “gatherings”, hosted via online platform Zoom, facilitate discussion without participants having to meet in person, making it more practical for beekeepers to take part.

**“With these online offerings, there is potential to have a discussion group and a managed exchange of information, without having to travel, without having to take a full day,” explains Gertje Petersen.**

As a scientist with AbacusBio in Dunedin and industry-science research group FutureBees NZ, Petersen is keen to encourage dialog between beekeepers and has seen similar concepts work in other industries.

“AbacusBio have experience running discussion groups that are regular or individual events with farmers from across all sorts of

sectors. So, I thought, if we have the experience, why not give it a try?”

On June 10 the first FutureBees NZ discussion group was held, with around a dozen beekeepers calling in to discuss the topic of “What can we learn from Covid19 about disease management in our own hives?” Two weeks later queen breeding and genetics were on the agenda and about 15 people tuned in to the discussion facilitated by Petersen.

Two more discussion groups are planned, for July 8 and 22, with the topics for those dates being “Varroa: Mite it be a Problem for You?” and “Opportunities in Honey Marketing”.

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Each session begins at 3.30pm and runs for approximately 90 minutes.

The discussions are open to anyone who wishes to register through the FutureBees NZ website and everyone who logs on is encouraged to participate in the discussion, but it is not a requirement, Petersen says.

"By having a few vocal people involved who are willing to share their expertise and share their experiences, other people should be willing to do the same.

"We do it as a Zoom call rather than a webinar because we want people to be able to talk to each other, not just to meet. If it gets to a situation where there is a lot of us, say more than 30 people, then we may make use of the function on Zoom where you can break off in to separate groups. That way we could have impulse discussions as smaller groups."

A lack of discourse is costing the apiculture industry and anything to stimulate discussion between beekeepers will be beneficial, Petersen believes.

"Whenever I go around visiting beekeepers I see a lot of repetition. I see several beekeepers running a trial of oxalic acid

Gertje  
Petersen

dribble. I think, well others have been doing that on a larger scale for years. How about you give them a ring and ask about the experience? But, no way. They would rather spend countless dollars running their own trial than talking to one another."

If the remaining two discussion groups prove beneficial, then more will be planned.

FutureBees NZ will also be launching a regular newsletter to keep beekeepers up to date on industry happenings, which Petersen details in a letter to the editor this month.

More information and registration details for the July discussion groups can be found at [www.futurebeesnz.wordpress.com](http://www.futurebeesnz.wordpress.com). 🐝

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# Supplied Insights



From **NICK TAYLOR**, general manager  
New Zealand Beeswax

For many beekeepers July will mean the last month of true offseason and a time to gear up for spring and the coming season. With those tasks in mind, I have three topics to update you on from New Zealand Beeswax's perspective.

## OPEN DAYS

With the ApiNZ conference cancelled this year, we thought it would be great for NZ Beeswax to host an open-day at both our Hamilton and Orari (South Canterbury) sites this July before beekeepers begin their new season.

The NZ Beeswax team are immensely proud of our facilities, products and services and are looking forward to sharing them with the beekeeping community.

Two of our most requested machines to observe will be operating and in full production. The world-first Frame Wash and Wax Service in Hamilton and the MegaBee Patty Plant in Orari.

This time of year it is common for beekeepers to ask, 'what's new?' and we will have some innovative new products on display, as well as some industry experts alongside the NZ Beeswax team.

## WAX BUYING

After a few months halt on buying beeswax, NZ Beeswax will be purchasing again from July. Our initial focus will be on receiving product from our regular supporters.

The global pandemic has knocked the confidence in global markets, with beeswax feeling the effects and thus our decision earlier in the year not to purchase.

With the world only tentatively re-opening, the market feedback suggests purchasing has only modestly recovered, to 70 or 80 percent of pre-Covid levels. Our team will continue to monitor the situation and reassess our purchasing and pricing each month.

With the spring wave slowly riding down the country from July, the best option will be to swap beeswax for spring health products.

## SPRING TREATMENTS

The rapid rise and subsequent correction in the apiculture industry has been well documented, but, even in these uncertain times, there



# OPEN DAY 2020

**Hamilton: Thursday 23rd July**  
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has been one area that continues to go from strength to strength. The largest supply trend we have witnessed over the last seven years has been the growth in the health and nutrition category.

"If we don't have healthy bees ready to perform, we don't have a business," or words to that effect is what I hear beekeepers say regularly.

I think bee performance when it truly matters is arguably more critical now than ever. With frustratingly tight flowering, weather and flow windows, there is no dress rehearsal; you are on stage and performing or you are booted off.

For this reason we believe in stocking only products that are trusted and proven to deliver beekeepers positive results regarding the health and nutrition of their bees.

The spring rush on varroa treatments and feeding supplements is just around the corner, maybe we will hear from you regarding them, the sale of beeswax or, better yet, see you at one of our open days. 🐝



Nick Taylor,  
general manager  
New Zealand  
Beeswax.



Trade supply stands at a beekeepers conference in Taupo in 2015. The lakeside town is likely to be the meeting place once again, for a similar event in August this year.

## NZBI to host “Mini- Conference”



New Zealand Beekeeping Inc are in the early stages of planning a “mini-conference” to bring beekeepers together in mid-August in Taupo.

Although only preliminary details had been finalised at time of publishing, NZBI president Jane Lorimer says they wish to get the word out to the public early to give beekeepers time to make travel plans.

The conference will be hosted by the Waikato branch of the industry body and is expected to bring together beekeepers, beekeeping supply companies and guest speakers.

It is open to all beekeepers and the wider apiculture community.

Lorimer advises those who may be interested in attending to contact her via email, [hunnybeejane@gmail.com](mailto:hunnybeejane@gmail.com), or phone/txt, 027 294 6559, for up to date information on the event.



# Letters to the Editor



## Canterbury Field-day Recap

Hello Beekeeping Community,

Sunday 14 June was a most enjoyable day at James and Richelle Corson's property in Whitecliffs, Canterbury. It was a pleasant morning drive up the valley in a hoar frost. My Queen Cell Production, PowerPoint Tutorial For Producing Large Numbers of Quality Queen Cells had a receptive audience, in the single men's quarters with the log burner going all day. Beekeepers rocked up from Geraldine, Central Otago, Mid and North Canterbury, plus the Nelson area.

Afterwards, Richelle and the Dog Team showed us the way of the Dog with AFB detection, reminding us that the dog's nose is more sensitive than many a fan-dangled machine. The latest addition to the team is K9 Chief, a spunky little black and white number.

It was a wonderful opportunity for beekeepers to have a one-on-one chat with Marco Gonzales, Operations Manager, AFB NPMP.

The warmth of the people who braved the cold and frozen night to warm their butts at the burning drums, with an entrée of duck salami, then savouring the home-kill tender pork spit roast drizzled and cooked in fabulous Mainland beech dew, along with homemade South American corn breads, an array of salads, plus Kiwi chocolate cake to fill the honey house with the buzz of laughter and conversation was a most pleasant feeling.

*The Gowanlea double-seater dunny got a lick of paint for the auspicious occasion of the Canterbury fieldday. Maggie James and James Corson having a quiet chat.*



Oh, I nearly forgot! Especially for the occasion, the day prior the long-drop received a stylish new coat of paint.

It was a good day... an early solstice, filling attendees with enthusiasm for the coming season.

Thanks very much to James and Richelle for their hospitality, Marco for representing the AFB NPMP, NZ Beeswax for goody bags, and most importantly attendees.

It was great for me to have my first winter run with my queen cell production tutorial; aimed specifically at commercial beekeepers and long-term hobbyists. This will be repeated in the North Island on Sundays 5 July Whangarei, 19 July NZ Beeswax Hamilton, 2 August Kerikeri, 16 August Rotorua. Enquiries welcome to [mjqueenb@xtra.co.nz](mailto:mjqueenb@xtra.co.nz)

**Maggie James, Leeston, Mid Canterbury**

## FutureBees Newsletter Announcement

Lots of things have been happening "behind the scenes" at FutureBees NZ since we went into lockdown. The sudden shift to figuring out how to work online, especially with partners and clients at a distance, has been a challenge, but it has also given us the push that we needed to begin the transformation of the FutureBees research project into a long-term strategic ally to the beekeeping industry. As a result, we have started the online beekeeper discussion groups, and will be publishing a monthly newsletter on aspects of beekeeping science, tech and business beginning in July.

These newsletters will be written in the voice of FutureBees as a strategic ally to your beekeeping business. They will be more consultant reports than scientist reports and will have a position and voice which is valuable to commercial beekeeping operations and everyone who has an interest in the industry. Whether focus of your business is producing honey, breeding queens or to support beekeepers in their daily operations, the aim of the FutureBees newsletter is to provide you with a forward looking view of the bee landscape around the world.

The newsletter is set to be released on a monthly basis starting on July 10th, 2020. It will cover certain topics in rotation:

- The Buzz on Bee Science - What is being published and what does it mean for us?
- (Novel) Beekeeping Tech
- The Business of Beekeeping
- Update on FutureBees Activities
- Practical Beekeeping
- Industry spotlight - Showcase of a business in beekeeping or the allied industries

FutureBees NZ is slowly growing into a platform for beekeeping businesses and bee scientists to integrate for a more sustainable beekeeping industry focusing on both economic viability and environmental impact. The newsletter will reflect this evolution - This is your chance to get on board!

**You can sign up for the newsletter under Contact on the FutureBees website, [futurebeesnz.wordpress.com](http://futurebeesnz.wordpress.com)**

**Gertje Petersen, FutureBees NZ** 🐝

# Editorial



July 2020 marks our twelfth issue of *Apiarist's Advocate* and, being a monthly publication, time to look back on our first year of existence.

The concept for our eMagazine was fleshed out last winter with a tag line of "News, Views and Promotions for Beekeepers, by Beekeepers" and brought into existence with our first issue in August 2019. That cover read "Can We Cooperate Like They Can?", referencing the apiculture industry, the bees we keep, alongside a proposal to form a honey producers cooperative.

Over the past year, through the prism of this eMagazine, we have witnessed evidence which could support either a positive or negative response to that overriding question.

Many people have given their time and thoughts freely and openly to support this publication and with it the wider apiculture industry. We aim to disseminate information to beekeepers and anyone else inclined to take interest in matters of apiculture, but without industry players willing to tell their stories, impart their knowledge or simply put an opinion forward, these pages could not be filled.

By imparting such information, that would otherwise remain the domain of a more limited audience, it can only foster a more highly-functioning, positively perceived and productive industry, albeit in a small way. To aid this goal we go to the source of stories, filter information as best we can before it enters our editorial content and ensure all comment is attributed.

Apiarist's Advocate has been founded on the concept of being available to all beekeepers, so anyone can subscribe free of charge. To balance this equation, our pages rely on advertising revenue for their existence. We have been supported by many businesses over the last 12 months and it took a leap of faith from a couple in particular to get us underway.

Packaging suppliers Pharmapac, honey processing equipment specialists HD Process NZ, along with beekeeping equipment suppliers Ecrotek and Ceracell, plus apiculture accountancy specialist Neville Marr backed our concept of an eMagazine sight unseen. Only a month later New Zealand Beeswax and MyApiary



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began their run as regular advertisers, with Manuka Orchard soon to come on board too.

We encourage our readers to support these businesses wherever possible to help reward their commitment to supporting our fledgling industry publication.

Despite the encouraging signs of cooperation we have witnessed through our pages there are still some fractures within our industry which cannot be ignored. In recent issues we have detailed disagreement between industry bodies over AFB Levy Order changes and this month our discussion with departing ApiNZ Board member Russell Marsh sees the Otago beekeeper touch on some divisions within the industry. While the honey producers cooperative itself failed to get off the ground.

*Apiarist's Advocate* will not shy away from the disagreements within the industry and will aim to put the facts of such matters in the open.

Some beekeepers and businesses are more giving with their time and open with information than others. A regular reader will soon learn which industry players are willing to support a more transparent industry, and those who are not, by their willingness to comment. We ask you to applaud the integrity and openness of those willing to go on the public record.

We don't claim to cover every story or have the resources to turn over every stone in pursuit of a matter, but we will continue to do our best to bring you a selection of industry happenings and stories on a monthly basis.

To that end, we need your support as readers. Keep reading and telling us what you want to read about, give news tips, leads on beekeepers to feature and let your opinion be known where it can add value.

Thanks for your support over the past year. Happy beekeeping, happy reading.

Patrick and Laura Dawkins, Marlborough beekeepers. 🐝

We welcome your feedback. Address a letter to [editor@apiadvocate.co.nz](mailto:editor@apiadvocate.co.nz) and share your opinion, or offer a news tip if you think there is something which should be covered.

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## Editorial

**Editor:** Patrick

To make comment or send press releases please email [editor@apiadvocate.co.nz](mailto:editor@apiadvocate.co.nz) or phone **Patrick, 027 383 7278**.

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Booking deadline is the second to last Friday of the month prior to publication and artwork must be supplied by the final Friday of the month.

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