

ISSUE 24, JULY 2021

APIARIST'S ADVOCATE



News, Views & Promotions - for Beekeepers - by Beekeepers

A background image showing a close-up of a honeycomb with several bees. The honeycomb is light-colored with some cells containing honey. The bees are scattered across the frame, some on the honeycomb and some in flight. An orange hexagonal shape is overlaid on the image, containing text.

Capping Off..

ApiNZ National Conference,
Canterbury Flooding,
A Beleaguered Online
Apiculture Course, Honey
Bee Research Symposium
and more...

Conference Takeaways



With around 1000 delegates and 60 trade displays filling the Rotorua Energy Events Centre, the Apiculture New Zealand (ApiNZ) National Conference acted as a three day show of positivity for a struggling beekeeping industry, June 24-26.

At its peak the national conference drew closer to 1500 delegates, but, given the drop in non-manuka honey prices experienced over the past three years, this year's turnout could be seen as a healthy one for ApiNZ. Chief executive Karin Kos agreed, saying she was pleased with the support given to the event by beekeepers.

Unlike two years ago, when the national conference was last held and the economics of the honey industry were the major talking point, conversations around bee health were increasingly prominent this year. That was perhaps unsurprising, given the event's focus of *Healthy Bees, Healthy Industry, Healthy Future*, combined with recent struggles with varroa and hive losses in the area.

While the main stage saw attendees tune in to video presentations from a range of keynote international speakers, as well as some local insight and updates from industry groups, some of the smaller seminar rooms allowed discussion on more specific issues, such as managing RMP facilities, practical beekeeping tips, creaming honey and mead making. Surrounding all of that was the regular flow of delegates through the trade displays, including the booth held by *Apiarist's Advocate*, which couldn't help noticing some key takeaways...

- New Zealand Avocado chief executive Jen Scoular's speaking slot on the first morning of the conference was titled "Unlocking an industry's potential", but might as well have been "The need for a commodity levy". Scoular spent her time on stage detailing how avocados have gone from a \$60million export industry in 2011 to \$231million in the space of 10 years, since the introduction of a grower levy. In 2019 ApiNZ saw their proposed honey levy voted down by a significant margin, so the message in Rotorua was about as subtle as a sledgehammer as beekeepers in the audience turned avocado-green with envy seeing the results of the fruit growers' investment.
- Scoular declared that "in the short, medium and long term, avocado growers absolutely need bees", while pointing out that avocado flowers have a 0.3% fruit set success, meaning there is plenty of scope for improved pollination.
- Kos' announcement that ApiNZ have been directed to form a Code of Welfare for bees had some beekeepers concerned about potential restrictions being put on their management practices. However, like with the manuka honey export standard, apiculture will have to jump at the request of MPI, and a draft Code has been drawn up.
- The message to control and monitor varroa mite came through loud and clear during several presentations and discussions, including from leading American honey bee scientist Dennis vanEngelsdorp who presented research that found varroa treatment and monitoring to be the top-ranking management criteria to determine colony health and mortality. "Mites matter. Monitor and treat them," he stressed.
- VanEngelsdorp's use of a robbing screen which masked hive entrances and greatly reduced reinvasion of varroa had Kiwi beekeepers thinking how they could implement a similar system on their hives.
- Canadian queen-bee researcher Patricia Wolf Veiga delivered what most beekeepers inherently know, but it is always good to be reminded of: "Do not overwinter weak hives. Miracles don't happen in winter. You will suffer high hive losses."
- As Californian "scientific beekeeper" Randy Oliver dished out updates on trials of pollen supplements and organic varroa treatments, a couple of things stood out. While he expects oxalic acid to be a "game changer for the treatment of varroa" he noted it was a far more effective treatment at



Trade displays at the Apiculture New Zealand National Conference in Rotorua.



Kristen Kohere-Soutar addressed the conference on behalf of the Manuka Charitable Trust, but failed to field questions from the audience despite admitting the Trust needed to improve their communications.

his site at higher altitude where there was no neighbouring hives to promote reinfestation. Unfortunately, many New Zealand beekeepers using a similar treatment regime are missing the, perhaps, vital component that the far reaches of the Sierra Nevada mountain range has provided.

- Oliver's breeding programme for varroa resistance is proving difficult to progress, with him hypothesising that drones could carry much of the relevant hereditary genetic material, thus slowing breeding advancements.
- National manager Clifton King and the AFB Management Agency introduced what is expected to be at least a year-

long consultation process as part of the 10-yearly review of the Pest Management Plan. King outlined the process clearly to the main auditorium and the Agency has since made the PDF version of the talk available on their website, set dates for webinars to detail the process on July 1, 5 & 8, emailed all registered beekeepers and sat down for an interview for page 18 of this publication – that's effective communication.

- Conversely, the Manuka Charitable Trust addressed the room through their chair Pita Tipene, via video-link, and Kristen Kohere-Soutar, the newly appointed executive chair of the Trust's operating arm Te Pitau, who flatly admitted "we have work to do in our communications" before both exited without answering any questions from the hundreds of beekeepers in attendance.
- On the issue of communication, MPI's manager for operational research Claire McDonald stated the Ministry wanted to communicate effectively with beekeepers throughout their process of reviewing the manuka honey standard. Unlike the Manuka Charitable Trust, McDonald at least followed her claim by answering questions from the many beekeepers gathered, who unsurprisingly grilled the MPI representative by pointing out inadequacies in the manuka definition set in 2018, who replied "to date there has been no robust evidence to support a change to the definition".

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- The MPI Pathogen Programme, which monitored selected apiaries across New Zealand every two and a half months for three years, has banked a "mountain of data" which made possible reports on the prevalence of many diseases of the hive. They included findings of *Nosema ceranae* in two South Island apiaries, along with two-thirds of all North Island apiaries. *Nosema Apis* was found in almost every apiary across the country.
- The general discussion generated between Harry Woods of Manuka Health and James Annabell of Egmont Honey, which was well facilitated by 100% Pure New Zealand Honey CEO Sean Goodwin, provided an enlightening insight into the international honey trade, as seen through the eyes of some of New Zealand's biggest packers. While both Woods and Annabell displayed the confidence in the industry that having tens of millions of dollars of annual honey export revenue will bring, those at the coal face of harvesting those honey crops will have benefitted from learning of the huge expense that comes with pushing into new markets, the length of that process, the dramatically increased cost of transporting goods in a Covid world, the challenge of balancing building a great brand with creating awareness of a product, how hard fought any price increase is in competitive market places, and that consumers care little about our export manuka honey standard and more about Codex definitions.



The honey market commentary provided by, from left, Sean Goodwin of 100% Pure New Zealand Honey, Harry Woods of Manuka Health and James Annabell of Egmont Honey was insightful.

- Otago beekeeper Allen McCaw's quip from the audience, following the honey market discussion detailed above, sums up the trading position of New Zealand beekeepers battling a backlog of honey: "We've got a big advantage with honey, in that it keeps. We've got a big disadvantage with honey, in that it keeps." 🐝

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Canterbury Beekeepers Count Cost of Floods



Widespread flooding in Canterbury over the final weekend of May brought instant devastation to many people and businesses, among them beekeepers, with estimates of more than 1000 beehives destroyed and many more damaged. The impact of the floods has been sudden, but it won't be until spring that many can assess the true toll on their hives.

Beekeepers all over Canterbury weighed up the risk when forecast heavy rain began to fall on May 28. Some elected to move hives to higher ground, while many others opted to keep apiaries in place and hope for the best, either because moving them was impractical or deemed unnecessary.

The result was widespread damage to hives as emergency was declared. Placing a number on the amount of hives damaged or destroyed is impossible, but South Canterbury based supply company New Zealand Beeswax general manager Nick Taylor says they were in correspondence with about 30 Canterbury beekeepers soon after the flooding and they estimate between one and two thousand hives to have been destroyed.

"Responses ranged from, 'nah not a problem' to 'I'm in trouble' and everything in between," Taylor says.

"It seems to be beekeepers in the high country who were hammered worse. They winter-down on rivers, close to the willows. They didn't have the time or the place to move their hives and when we initially spoke to them they didn't even have the ability to check on them because access was limited to many areas."

WINTER WOES

Among the worst affected areas was Staveley and Mt Somers, west of Methven, with Mt Somers recording its most ever rainfall for a 48-hour period, 526mm.

Beekeepers in the area are understood to have suffered significant hive losses, among them Greg Barnaby, owner of Coal Creek Honey, who says almost a third of his 350 hives have had water go through them, while his family's newly built house and base for their business has also been severely damaged.

"All of our supers are kept in 20-foot containers and they are not watertight. They are a bit of a shambles," Barnaby says, speaking while trying to clean up his beekeeping shed and workshop which also suffered damage.

"Everything in the house is a write-off. Water came 600 millimetres up the walls and everything below that will need to go, carpet, flooring, batts," he says.

As for the hives, he knows he has lost nearly 100, but how many more of their damaged colonies will survive until spring, Barnaby is uncertain.

"Wet hives are not ideal anytime, but especially not winter."

He is concerned that water in lower brood-box frames could freeze, given their location at the foot of the Southern Alps, creating a fridge for the remaining bees to live within.

Greatly reduced winter survival is a concern shared by nearby beekeeper Leah Mee, owner of Southern Alps Honey.

Mee says they anticipate about one quarter of their approximately 1000 hives have been affected by flood waters.

"Some have got some bees flying in and out, but 50 percent of their bees might be dead. They may make it through. I am not sure," Mee says.

While the loss or damage of hive equipment comes at a cost to replace, Mee also holds concern at the state of the remaining hives' health.

"We had just loaded them up with honey, pollen patty, varroa treatments and, I guess, the water damage will mean the varroa treatments won't work, the pollen patty will turn to mush and the honey could go rank," Mee says.

Silt carried by flood waters has also penetrated many hives in the region, leaving frames unusable and beekeepers the job of removing them and salvaging what they can.

REPRIEVE FOR SOME

For some beekeepers the impact of the floods has been devastating, while many will be glad the rain stopped when it did.



Nearly 100 of Canterbury Beekeeper Greg Barnaby's hives, such as these, were seriously damaged or lost to May flood waters, which also swept through his newly built home and sheds in Staveley.

"There are some horror stories and there are some relieved beekeepers thinking it could have been a lot worse," Taylor says.

With Canterbury beekeepers fond of placing hives nearby to rivers – oftentimes inside stopbanks – for over-wintering and spring build up purposes, there are plenty at flood risk.

In North Canterbury James Malcolm, owner-director of Natural New Zealand Honey, says his entire operation's almost 5000 honey hives and 2000 nucs were "sitting on a riverbed for winter".

"So, what do you shift?" he asks.

Malcolm was one of the beekeepers who decided to sit tight and accept the fate of his apiary sites, with the result a loss of 200 nucs and 150 full size hives.

"There wouldn't have needed to be much more rain for us to have lost a lot more. I reckon 100 millimetres more rain and we would have lost a third of our operation."

As it is, he expects the cost of the damage to be in the range of \$100,000 due to replacement equipment, labour, having to split and weaken other hives, and the loss of over-wintered queens.

RAIN ON THE PLAIN

While those in the high country copped the worst of it, beekeepers lower on the Canterbury plains were far from unscathed.

Midlands Apiaries, perhaps the largest South Island beekeeping operation, suffered "150 dead, 50 of them washed away, another 200 damaged but still alive," according to operations manager Matt McCully's best estimates.



Floodwaters swept through apiaries and up brood boxes, drowning bees and depositing silt into hives, such as these Southern Alps Honey hives of Dave and Leah Mee which suffered as feeder creeks to the Rakaia River raged.

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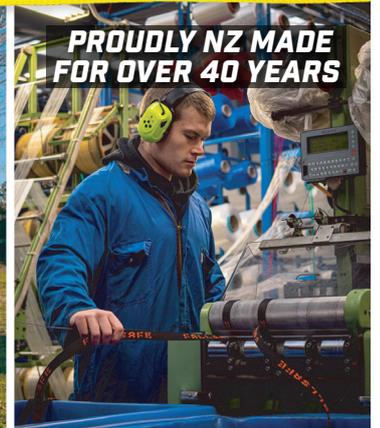
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"We didn't have as many hives damaged as what I first thought we would. A lot of sites we went to, where I was expecting damage, were not affected. I was pleasantly surprised," McCully says.

Third-generation Leeston beekeeper Barry Hantz says he has never seen the Selwyn River as high as it was over the last weekend of May. Hantz Honey moved hives to higher ground, but were still caught out in some areas as it was difficult to predict where rivers would jump their stopbanks. Where they did, hives have often been damaged, but not destroyed.

"It's not always a raging torrent that will wash the hives away, but it is enough to fill the bottom box half up with water and silt. Nine times out of 10 they are still there though," Hantz says.

RECOVERY

While many insurance policies cover loss or damage to hives through flooding, not all beekeepers impacted are fully insured, especially with hive values having dropped dramatically in recent years. That will mean some are likely to exit the industry, with a rebuild of their business unviable in the current economic climate.

Apiculture is far from the worst hit industry though, with agriculture and horticulture industries particularly badly impacted as flood waters destroyed crops, animals and infrastructure.

Many Canterbury beekeepers are aware of the plight of others and putting their flooding setbacks in perspective, with Barnaby assessing his badly damaged new house in Staveley, plus sheds and business, stoically.



While some silt laden beehives have been assessed, such as this one, following Canterbury flooding, many others will need to wait until spring time says Leah Mee of Southern Alps Honey.

"That's OK, we know how to fix it because we only just finished building it and moved in six weeks ago," he says drily.

"We know where to find the tradesmen."

Nearby, Mee says it will be months before recovery really gets underway in their hives and the true loss counted.

"There is not a lot we can do right now, it is just a matter of wait and see really," she says.

"The spring will tell us more of a story, I'm sure." 🐝



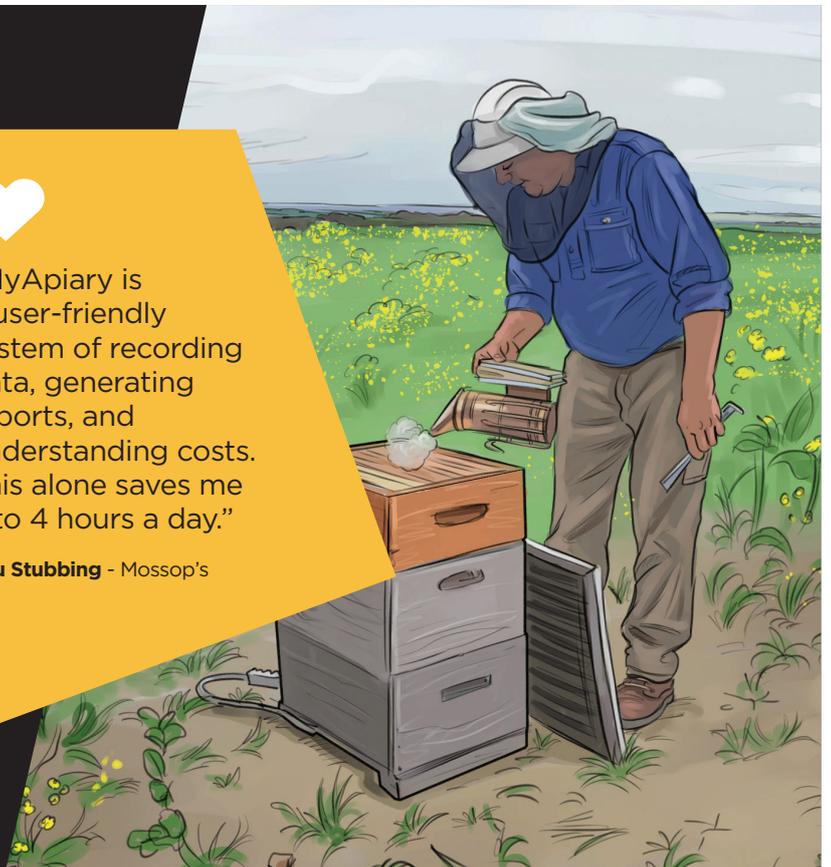
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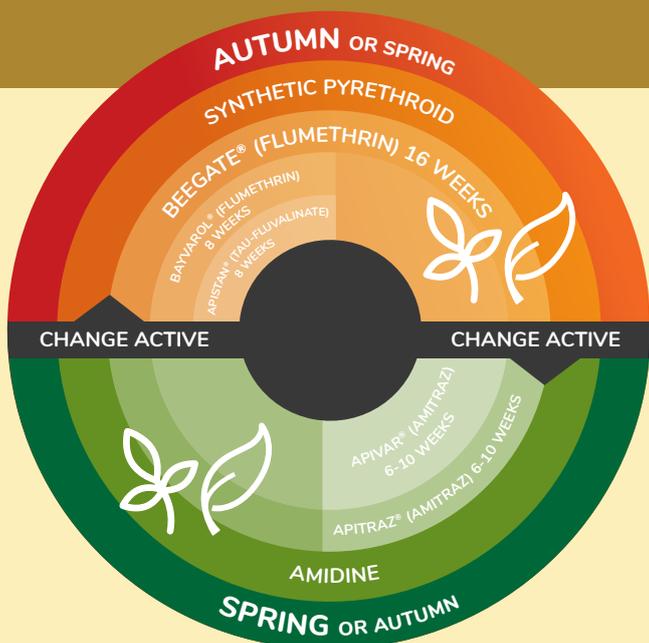
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Online Course Cops More Criticism



Students of an online Level 3 beekeeping course delivered by Southern Institute of Technology (SIT) continue to report problems with the course and say, despite submitting final papers in mid-May, a lack of communication from the provider has them unsure whether they have gained their qualification or not. However, in the face of the numerous complaints from students, along with stories addressing the issue of substandard apiculture training in **April** and **May** issues of *Apiarist's Advocate*, SIT plan to continue their online training, saying they have made improvements to rectify the failings of the inaugural intake.

"Only good for firestarter" and "just a piece of paper you wouldn't hang on the wall," is how students are describing their Level 3 Certificate in Apiculture qualification from SIT, if they ever get it.

With the New Zealand Government coming to the party to fund Level 3 and 4 courses, new students have flocked into the apiculture courses all over New Zealand. However, beekeeping employers have said they see little value in graduates of some training institutes.

Students of SIT seem resigned to the fact that the qualification they have spent the last beekeeping season trying to obtain will hold little value for them should they wish to seek paid beekeeping work.

"I'm a hobbyist and thought it was a good way to get more information than reading a book. I thought it might be a good stepping stone to a commercial role, but it is not what they promised, that's for sure," says Nikita Todd, who despite having handed in her last paper more than six weeks previous, is unsure if she has passed SIT's course or not.

Todd's experiences of the SIT course are reflective of many of her fellow students, who have aired their grievances to *Apiarist's Advocate*. They say communications with SIT have been haphazard throughout the course and that has not changed as they now wait, unsure of their final grades.

SIT has responded to the delay by saying it is a matter of matching student's work with disease elimination courses they were required to complete through the American Foulbrood Pest Management Agency. However, Todd says she has provided SIT with her certificate of completion on several occasions, yet still waits.

The delays and miscommunication are emblematic of the course's structure and the problems have persisted since the beginning.

The online teaching and assessment model has been troublesome, students say, supporting the opinions of several beekeepers with training experiences who have detailed "limitations" and "deficiencies" in online beekeeping courses.

"It is very frustrating. The whole way through the course we have pretty much been educating ourselves via google. If I wanted to do that I could have done it without the Government paying for TTAF courses," Todd says.

Just short of \$5million of taxpayer money has been given to "provider based" apiculture courses in 2020 under the Target Training and Apprenticeship Fund, which spans a wide range of industries and is set to last until at least 2022 and cost \$1.6billion.

While one doesn't have to go far to find someone in the apiculture industry who is concerned that many training courses add little value to the industry, most at least involve time in the beehives for students, overseen by more experienced beekeepers. However, SIT offered their fully online course for the first time over the last beekeeping season and will do so again, with a new intake starting in late August.



The "TTAF" makes \$1.6billion dollars of tax-payer money available to trades training, including SIT's Level 3 online apiculture course which has come under criticism.

The decision appears to fly in the face of the feedback provided by their inaugural intake of students, as well as many in the industry, including employers, who they are supposedly training people for. However, SIT feel there is value in the course they offer.

"The online delivery model meets the needs of people in the sector who are not able to attend face-to-face classes and who will benefit from the opportunity to study for a relevant qualification in this area," SIT chief executive Onno Mulder says.

Based on feedback from the last course, SIT say they have made improvements to their material. Those changes include starting the course at a date that they believe better aligns with the beekeeping season, and making sure students have access to at least 12 beehives.

"The purpose of the programme is to provide the apiculture industry with individuals who possess the skills and knowledge to work safely and effectively as assistant beekeepers," Mulder says.

"This course was developed to meet apiculture's industry growth in New Zealand. Industry stakeholders were consulted during the initial accreditation and approvals processed to deliver this programme ... SIT has continued liaising closely with industry, including attendance at industry events, such as the New Zealand Apiculture Conference held in Rotorua annually."

SIT had no delegates at the Apiculture New Zealand National Conference in Rotorua in June though and it was not held last year. SIT staff are also aware, at the very least, of the criticism that



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has been levelled at their online training through, these pages, social media and their own internal complaints processes.

"I don't want to crucify SIT, I just think they need to pull their socks up," says one student who did not want to be named, adding "It is not fair that all these students have put in hard work, and it was really stressful, and now our qualifications are worthless." 🐝



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Science Symposium Packs in the Knowledge



From gut bacteria, metals of the brain and American foulbrood (AFB) bacteriophages, to over stocking of hives, monitoring pollen sources and a potential stumbling block for the control of giant willow aphid, The 2nd New Zealand Honey Bee Research Symposium in Rotorua packed in knowledge like a honey bee tightly filling a cell with pollen.

About 60 members of the apiculture industry, primarily beekeepers and scientists, filled a conference room at the Rotorua Energy Events Centre on June 23 to learn of 21 current, future or recently completed research projects.

While each speaker had 15 minutes to bring the audience up to speed with their work, the associated question time following each presentation, and social opportunities during breaks, provided

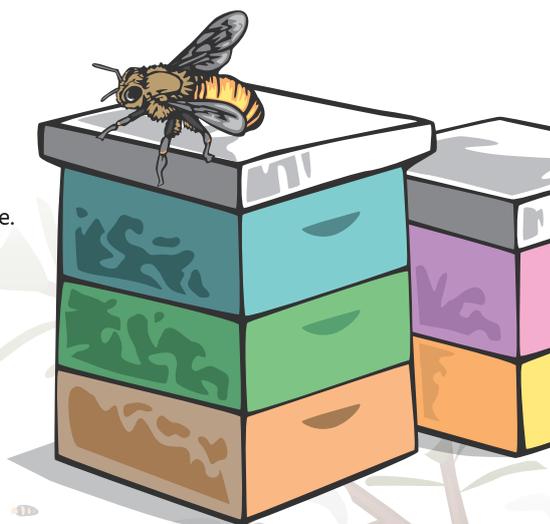


Updates from Massey University's ABATE project members, such as Jo Turnbull pictured speaking here, were well received by beekeepers and event organisers alike at the Honey Bee Research Symposium in Rotorua.

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plenty of opportunity for deeper discussion on the wide range of topics.

The Symposium was opened by Apiculture New Zealand (ApiNZ) chief executive Karin Kos who praised the variety and scope of presentations on the programme, while noting that apiculture needs a clear industry plan, and science can help with that.

Varroa mite was a regular discussion point and both Kos and New Zealand Beekeeping Inc president Jane Lorimer, who opened the afternoon session, addressed the issue of high levels of hive deaths, largely attributable to varroa mite, in some parts of the country recently.

That made the presentation of Ashburton beekeeper Rae Butler timely, when she detailed the varroa monitoring work of the Mite Monitor programme in Canterbury over the recent beekeeping season. Butler also pressed several other presenters on the potential value of collaboration between a wider-scale varroa monitoring program and their own work.

Those beekeepers who put their hives to work in commercial pollination would have been particularly interested in the presentation of AbacusBio's Gertje Petersen who unveiled a method of electronically measuring not just hive activity, but entry and exit of individual bees as part of their research. The resulting activity graphs displayed distinctive surges of activity throughout the day.

The ABAtE project from Massey University, which is striving to create an AFB "vaccine" for beehives, always has beekeepers pricking up their ears and in Rotorua there were three speaking

slots set aside for Heather Hendrickson's lab. While they have not yet found the bacteriophages required to form a cocktail to fight all strains of the AFB pathogen *Paenibacillus larvae*, their team is exploring methods to evolve the phages they do have to increase their productivity and move the project along faster.

The presentations of ABAtE team members Danielle Kok and Jo Turnbull also captured the attention of organisers, who recognised their presentations as best of the day.

AFB was again the area of interest when John Mackay detailed dnature Diagnostics and Research's new Foster Method for diagnosing the bacterial disease, which involves a simple swap at the hive entrance which is then sent to their lab for testing. The process is simpler and quicker for beekeepers to carry out than previous testing methods, and they hope to have the research behind it published in the near future, Mackay said.

The discovery of a previously unidentified insect is putting the control of giant willow aphid at risk, Scion scientist Stephanie Sopow told the symposium. The February 2020 release of a parasitoid, imported from California, as a biocontrol of the aphid has resulted in an "enormous" population of the *Pauesia* insect already, pleasing Sopow and beekeepers alike. However, a predator to the parasitoid has emerged and they are seeking to learn more about the previously unknown insect.

Event organiser and Plant and Food Research scientist Ashley Mortensen closed the day by saying that, following an inaugural event held online last winter, the in-person symposium "fostered the connectivity we wanted". 🐝



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In Beekeeping, Timing is Everything

A Devastating Discovery

It started in October, his bees were absconding. Discovering colony loss is heartbreaking, no matter how many years you've been beekeeping. When beekeeping is your business, this loss has an all-too-real impact on the future of your company and family. That's what Peter Chorabik was faced with two years ago when his colonies in Ontario, Canada were cut in half, lost to the devastating Varroa mite.

A Timely Wake Up Call

For years, Peter's go-to treatment was multiple applications of oxalic acid in the fall, which kept losses around 30% — an acceptable reality for his business and region. When his apiaries were hit hard by Varroa mites two years ago, he spent some time rethinking his treatment plan. Peter recalls working with oxalic acid, "Something always seemed to be going wrong." Despite being a cheaper product upfront, Peter often faced unexpected costs and unavoidable delays. He needed to rebuild, but also find a more reliable Varroa treatment that would ensure further growth for his apiaries.

He turned to *Formic Pro*, adding a mid-summer treatment of this all-natural product made with formic acid that targets Varroa mites where they reproduce, under the brood cap. This results in higher efficacy rates compared to oxalic acid, which only kills mites in the dispersal phase (phoretic) that are found on adult bees.

Plus, the ready-to-use strips meant *Formic Pro* would be a dependable, scalable application solution.

Commercial Apiaries Can't Afford Setbacks

As viruses compound, it becomes even more critical to get mite loads under control before the winter brood is produced. In Peter's case, waiting to treat with oxalic acid until after his honey harvest was too little, too late. By adding *Formic Pro* to his treatment plan, he was able to safely treat during the summer honey flow to ensure the bees hatching in early fall are healthy. This more flexible and effective treatment properly protects and prepares his colonies for winter.

"We had 30% more honey because the bees overwintered better."

Bouncing Back

Just two years after his heartbreaking discovery, their apiaries have bounced back to more than 500 colonies. Peter is proud to report an overall survival rate of 84% this past winter after using *Formic Pro*. He consults his records, "We had 30% more honey because the bees overwintered better."

Going into spring with stronger bees, Peter looks forward to even more productivity from his hives this year. 🐝



In 2012, Peter Chorabik began his beekeeping venture with just two hives. After some hard work, he and his wife, Sarah Allinson-Chorabik, turned those hobby hives into a commercial operation with 500 colonies. They now run two full-time businesses: *Toronto Bee Rescue* and *Ontario Honey Creations*.



To learn more about *Formic Pro*, visit www.nodglobal.com

First Time's a Charm



The Rotorua Honey Bee Club doesn't know exactly what type of honey it is, but they know it's a winner.

On home turf, the first-time entrants scooped the national award for the top honey produced by a bee club or association at the Apiculture New Zealand National Honey Awards. Club president Kim Poynter was on hand to receive the trophy, announced by renowned honey judge Maureen Conquer and presented by Kevin Powell, of awards sponsor Kiwi Labels.

Club member Wendy Pickett, who has nine hives in the Taupo area and has been with the club since 2017, was the producer of the award-winning honey. The club president broke the news to her via phone following the ceremony.

"She was absolutely stoked. It's very exciting for her and the club," Poynter says.

While Pickett did get a pollen count on the honey, she has since misplaced the result. So, the exact makeup of the batch is unknown.

"She doesn't know what it is ... a Taupo multiflora! It tasted really good, it's lovely and clear, on the dark end of the medium spectrum," Poynter described.

Entry criteria in the club category is wide and not limited to any particular colour or consistency, such as other categories in the competition.

The prize is apt recognition for a club that has built a strong membership since establishing in 2010. They have between 120 and 140 "family" memberships, so represent about 200 beekeepers spread over a large area which includes Rotorua, Taupo, Tauranga, Otorohanga and Ohope.

"Our club's objective has always been to promote local support, knowledge and education for responsible beekeeping practice," Poynter says.

"Knowledge will create a community where we have good responsible beekeeping."

The club's decision to hold a local honey competition and then progress the winner to the national awards was not about putting their name in lights, but extending the club's mantra of support and education.

Fiona O'Brien, an Otorohanga beekeeper of considerable honey show experience, acted as the club's expert.

"She spoke to our monthly gathering about the fact that this competition even existed and about presentation of honey, the finer points on how it needed to be presented for competition. The following month we had our club 'Give it a Go' competition where people were encouraged to bring in their honey."



Kim Poynter, president of the Rotorua Honey Bee Club, accepts the award for the best honey submitted by a club at the National Honey Awards, with Kevin Powell of sponsor Kiwi Labels making the presentation.



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The club provided jars for members to use when submitting honey, with Pickett's winning out and getting the opportunity to advance to the national awards.

"Wendy was inspired by the talk about giving it a go and she presented a beautiful honey. This is the first time she has entered a competition."

While Poynter got to proudly collect the club's award, it was not her only trip to the stage during the ceremony. She walked away with a literal box-load of awards for her personal Bush Haven Farm Honey submissions, plus the award for the gift basket category.

"I'm a hobbyist, so to be able to go up against the big boys, it was pretty exciting to get some awards," the keeper of about 50 hives says.

"Hobbyists sometimes feel like we are not flash enough, not good enough to put our honeys up against the commercials and packers. So, it was marvellous to be able to provide that opportunity."

She also wanted to recognise sponsor Kiwi Labels, who made available gold, silver and bronze stickers for award winning honey producers to apply to their labels.

The Rotorua club will continue to provide opportunities to beekeepers in the area, with regular Sunday afternoon gatherings which include speakers and practical demonstrations, a bi-monthly newsletter and even plans to hold a two-day conference in April next year.



Wendy Pickett and the Rotorua Honey Bee Club's award-winning honey and prize haul.

While all of those things take work, Poynter says they are worthwhile exercises and the honey competition is an example of that, but not because it resulted in a national award.

"There is a bit of work for the club in first preparing the education on how to present, then running the honey comp. It's a bit of effort, but I think it is a great way for people to learn how to best present and prepare their honey, not just for competition, but for wherever it is going."

The Rotorua Honey Bee Club welcomes new members, with club details available at www.rotoruahoneybeeclub.co.nz 🐝

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Anaphylaxis and the Families of Beekeepers



Severe reactions to bee stings among beekeepers and their families is not uncommon. Among those affected are the family of Auckland beekeeper Phil Brown. Two of Brown's three children, as well as his wife, have suffered allergic reactions. **CHRIS NORTHCOTT** looks into how the Browns have responded to, and reduced, the risk of anaphylaxis in several of their family members, thus allowing their beekeeping business to continue.

One day at school, the teen-aged Josiah Brown was stung by a bee on his foot while playing sports during his lunch break. Thinking little of it, he dealt with the stinger and played on.

Around twenty minutes later back in class, Josiah started to feel strange. His mind became fuzzy, his eyesight started to blur, and he was seeing unusual dots in his vision. As he went to the school nurse his face started to swell, he developed a cough, and heard cracking sounds when he swallowed. His throat was beginning to swell too. Things were heading south quickly for Josiah.

Fortunately, the school's first aid kit included an EpiPen ready-to-go emergency adrenalin injector, which helped suppress the symptoms until he could be ambulated to the nearby hospital.

His younger sister Annelise has stood on a bee and received the customary retaliation. Her symptoms were not as severe as her brother's, but still serious enough for her to be taken to hospital as a precautionary measure.

Phil Brown, their father, is a self-employed beekeeper from west Auckland with 16 years of experience in the industry. While his two eldest kids have serious allergies to stings, their younger sibling

has so far managed to avoid being stung and has not volunteered to find out what happens if he is.

Wife Rachel developed milder allergies to bee stings several years after he started out beekeeping and Brown himself suffers no adverse reactions to stings – apart of course from the usual pain!

So, in the Brown family it is only the *family* that is allergic to bee stings, and not the beekeeper himself.

This is not uncommon and over the years there have been several instances of New Zealand beekeeper's children killed by bee stings and associated anaphylaxis.

According to the Auckland Hospital Immunology Clinic, someone dies in New Zealand from bee or wasp sting anaphylaxis about every two or three years. While the numbers aren't high, it appears that beekeepers' families are more likely to become part of that unfortunate statistic.

Research out of Switzerland in 2005 by Ulrich Muller confirmed the susceptibility of both beekeepers and their immediate family to severe sting anaphylaxis. Muller recommends three courses of action for those patients with bee venom allergies. Firstly, reduction of exposure to bees or hives is advised. Then self-



Despite having undertaken desensitisation treatment, Josiah Brown is sure to cover up when helping his father in the apiary, having previously suffered severe allergic reactions to bee stings.

medication and easy access to emergency treatment is endorsed, with adrenalin or self-injection EpiPens highly recommended. Lastly, for patients with moderate to severe reactions, immunotherapy is promoted.

The Browns aren't sure what has caused the increased risk of anaphylaxis for their family. Amongst their acquaintances there is agreement that there is a definite correlation between beekeeper's children and severe reactions, but little certainty about why. It is thought that very minor but regular exposure to bee venom causes the body to overreact to a real dose in a sting. Muller's findings supported that hypothesis, with the Swiss researcher determining that a major risk factor towards developing an allergic reaction to be beekeepers who had reported less than 10 stings annually.

Bee suits, or even clothes worn under bee suits, when washed with family laundry could be a source of venom transfer, but neither the Browns or any of their acquaintances are sure of how their family members' allergies have developed.

Whatever the case, his family developing severe allergies has caused Brown to change some of his beekeeping practises. He is much more cautious about allowing trailing bees to follow him or his vehicle into public spaces and takes extra effort to ensure the bees remain calm throughout a site visit to minimise stings on his suit.

He also keeps EpiPens on hand when out at his apiaries. They are a recurring expense, with most having an expiry date around 18 months after first purchase, but simpler to use than prescription vials of adrenaline and syringes. They are also an inconvenience,

especially when their importance and use must regularly be explained to parents and teachers for visits to friends' homes and for school trips. But they give peace of mind – when they are really needed, they buy time and save lives.

Rachel, Josiah, and Annelise have all had desensitization treatment to reduce the risk of an anaphylactic reaction. Desensitization is a process of carefully teaching the body to tolerate an allergen, such as bee venom, by introducing it by minute, but gradually increasing, amounts.

The goal of the treatment is to have the patient's immune system tolerate the injected equivalent of two bee stings' worth of venom. Interestingly, the bee venom was imported all the way from France, and it does not necessarily hurt as much as a real bee sting!

The treatment initially required multiple trips to the central Auckland hospital and Starship immunology department, but later the treatment was given at a monthly trip to their local GP. Josiah's body had trouble tolerating some of the smaller initial doses, and so they had to delay his treatment and have the doses weakened even further to begin. But all three of them, after three to five years, have completed treatment and are now deemed at low-risk of anaphylactic reaction to bee venom.

Although they were not aware of the research carried out by Dr Muller in Europe, the Browns advice for beekeepers or families with severe bee sting allergies align with his recommendations.

"Investigate getting desensitised", they say. At the very least it gives peace of mind, and especially for the sake of kids who are often away on school camps, out on bushwalks, or at beaches a long way from a hospital or from cell phone reception. 🐝

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We Want You ... to Consult, say Agency



“We want to hear from you”.

That’s the call to beekeepers from the Management Agency American Foulbrood (AFB) Pest Management Plan (PMP) ahead of consultation on the plan for how AFB will be managed in New Zealand for the next 10 years.

The Biosecurity Order which sets in law the PMP expires on April 1 2023 and the Agency are required to provide the Minister, through the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI), with a proposal that reflects beekeepers’ feedback.

Beekeepers will have until 5pm on Sunday July 11 to provide feedback for the first round of consultation in a year-long process that will set the AFB PMP for the ten year period following 2023.

The PMP sets out the legal obligations to which beekeepers must adhere when it comes to managing hives.

National manager of the AFB PMP Clifton King says he is ready for what beekeepers throw at the Agency and his key message to beekeepers is clear.

“Irrespective of their views we want to hear from beekeepers. It is important they have their say,” King says.

“If beekeepers believe the PMP should be unchanged for the next 10 years, we want to hear from them. If they believe it requires minor changes before being extended, we want to hear from them. If they believe it requires major changes to some or all parts of it, we want to hear from them. And if they believe it should be revoked, we want to hear from them.”

The initial round of consultation gives beekeepers the opportunity to provide feedback through an online survey, accessed through the AFB PMP website or links emailed directly to registered beekeepers. It provides beekeepers a mix of tick boxes and areas to type more detailed recommendations.

That feedback will form any proposed major, big picture changes which the Agency hopes to be able to announce in September or October of this year. At that time, they will call for more feedback. From there, that second round of beekeeper feedback will be used to form more detailed changes which will be announced next winter. Then a third and final round of consultation will be undertaken, before presenting a proposal to MPI.

The whole processes has been budgeted to cost \$170,000, which is funded through beekeepers’ AFB levies.

“One of the reasons it costs quite a bit is it takes time and effort to undertake three rounds of consultation, but we want to make changes that are consistent with the future the beekeeping industry wants,” King says.

Beekeepers can access the online consultation survey [here](#). 



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A Sting in the Tale Head



The bees have treated Wanganui beekeeper Neil Farrer well for almost four decades now, but it didn't start out that way. Having been a small commercial operator for over 30 years, and then more recently the owner-operator of Apiary Services which supplies Feedbee pollen substitute to beekeepers all over New Zealand, Farrer owes a lot to the humble honey bee, but their relationship didn't start out smoothly at all.

Farrer's *A Sting in the Tale* story is in fact a tale of many stings, and not to the tail but the head. That was the result of his first encounter with a beehive left behind his garage in the early 1980s when his stepson moved away from town. The transaction of hive from junior to senior went something like this:

Neil Farrer – selling up his Apiary Services business after over 30 years in apiculture, a journey which began with a painful lesson.



Son: "I'm going to sell up and move around the countryside and, by the way, I have put a beehive around behind the garage."

Farrer: "What the hell do I know about bees!?"

Son: "You'll soon learn."

"I soon did," says a present-day Farrer, but it was a sharp and painful learning curve.

A beekeeping friend who kept a few hobby hives was enlisted to show Farrer the inside of the hive for the first time. Unfortunately, that friend did not have any spare beekeeping gear.

"I put on a pair of green overalls I had in the shed, along with my gumboots, so that part was OK," Farrer explains.

"I had some rubber work gloves, so that part was OK too. That just left the top end... but no brain, no pain as they say!

"We had been changing some curtains around the house and we had a bit of scrappy curtain. So, I improvised, put on a floppy hat, wrapped the curtain around my face and away we went. It was not a good move..."



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Despite using a smoker, the bees in his newly inherited hive took umbrage to Farrer's first visit and soon were crawling under his homemade "veil" from top and bottom.

"By the time they were all going crazy around the top of my head it was too late. I bolted inside, chucking things everywhere and doing the usual amount of swearing."

After a shower and a good wash of the head, Farrer's wife painstakingly pulled stingers out of the top of his cranium, counting each as she went, all the way to 16.

"I remember feeling not too good for about 24 hours after that. After that it came right and I didn't worry about it."

Sixteen stings to the melon might have been enough to end many people's dalliance with bees then and there, but not Farrer.

"It made me more determined to get control of the situation. I rapidly bought the appropriate equipment and learnt properly. I joined the local bee club and read extensively on the subject, went out with commercial beekeepers, as you do, and I found out all about beekeeping.

"I can't remember why those bees were so agitated at the time. They might have just been stroppy bees. Nowadays I would have no problem dealing with that, but then I didn't know a thing of course."

He has gone on to have a commercial beekeeping business, which included pollination services and nuc hive sales, then the Apiary Services business he is now looking to sell as, being in his 80s, he eyes retirement. However, those careers might have gone by the wayside before they even began, if not for his resolve to continue following his first ill-fated dalliance in the hives.

That determination to learn and improve his beekeeping is one which has lasted.

"I often tell people, when showing them around hives, 'if there is a mistake to made, I have made it over the years'. That is how you learn quickly, that this is not the right way, there must be a better way," Farrer says, adding "That first lesson was by far the most painful though!"

Neil Farrer is the owner of Apiary Services, more information relating to the business and its sale can be gained by: **ph 027 457 9634, email nfarrer@xtra.co.nz** 🐝



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Keeping Bees in Residential Areas, by Council – Lower North Island



PHIL EVANS continues his series of articles summarising Council's requirements for keeping beehives in residential, urban areas by detailing 11 Councils from the lower North Island.

In these areas, six Councils have (as best I could research) no rules pertaining to beehives in residential or urban areas, while five have specific restrictions.

Complaints about bees are managed under the bylaw stated for each Council. This means the council will investigate, and may suggest changes to location, entrance direction, water availability, fence height, or removal on a case-by-case basis.

Disclaimer – *The information presented here should be used as a guide only, and has been found on the Council's websites and through contact with Council staff. For full details of rules, restrictions, fees etc. for keeping bees in your region, please contact your local Council.*

Auckland Council Beekeeping rules are being revised. Submissions opened on June 8 and close on July 13.

Kapiti Coast District Council is reviewing their rules as part of a review of their Keeping of Animals, Bees and Poultry Bylaw. Submissions opened June 28 and close July 28. More details available [here](#).

The following councils have no formal restrictions, other than nuisance guidelines in their associated bylaws.

HUTT CC
MASTERTON DC

Control of Animals Bylaw 2018
Part 6 - Wairarapa Consolidated Bylaw 2019

SOUTH WAIRARAPA DC

Part 6 - Wairarapa Consolidated Bylaw 2019

CARTERTON DC

Part 6 - Wairarapa Consolidated Bylaw 2019

UPPER HUTT CC

Keeping of Stock, Poultry and Bees Bylaw 2005

WELLINGTON CC

Wellington Consolidated Bylaw 2008
Part 2

The following Councils have specific rules, and may require permits and fees. Nuisance rules are included in the associated bylaws for each Council.

RANGITIKEI DISTRICT COUNCIL

Animal Control Bylaw 2019.

- Permit required from Council.
- Fees of \$60 per hour for time taken.
- Hives must be set back 5m from boundary.
- All neighbours consent in writing required.

MANAWATU DC

Animal Bylaw 2019, plus Online Beekeeping Registration Form.

- Minimum 1m from boundary, 1.6m fence height.
- **Hive Numbers**
 - < 500m² – no hives
 - 500-700m² – 2 hives
 - 701-1000m² – 4 hives
 - 1001-2000m² – 6 hives
 - >2001m² – 8 hives
- Must notify Council of location and number of hives.
- Require a permit, where conditions may be imposed, if unable to comply with above.

PALMERSTON NORTH CITY COUNCIL

Animals and Bees Bylaw 2018

- Requires submitting an Animals and Bees Bylaw Permit Application Form
- Minimum 1m from boundary, 1.6m fence height
- **Hive numbers**
 - < 500m² – no hives
 - 500-700m² – 2 hives
 - 701-1000m² – 4 hives
 - 1001-2000m² – 6 hives
 - >2001m² – 8 hives
- Must notify Council of location and number of hives.
- Require permit (no charge) if unable to comply with above, where conditions may be imposed.

PORIRUA CITY COUNCIL

Part 7 - Porirua City Council General Bylaw 1991

- Must get permission from all neighbours before setting up hives.
- Must advise new neighbours of existing hives.
- Must register with Apiculture NZ and adhere to their Code of Conduct.

KAPITI COAST DC

Keeping of Animals, Bees & Poultry Bylaw 2010

- Permit required (fees may apply).
- Permit can be cancelled if complaints from 2 adjoining neighbours received. 🐝



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Feebate will Sting: One look at the Rotorua Energy Events Centre carpark during the Apiculture New Zealand National Conference showed what beekeepers are driving and that they will surely be stung by the Government's contentious "Feebate" scheme. From January, buyers of newly imported high carbon emitting light vehicles, a category into which utes fall, will be hit with fees used to then offset rebates offered to low emission vehicles such as electrics and hybrids. That means beekeepers could face an estimated almost \$3000 on top of the price of their new Hilux, Ranger or Triton utes. That stings!



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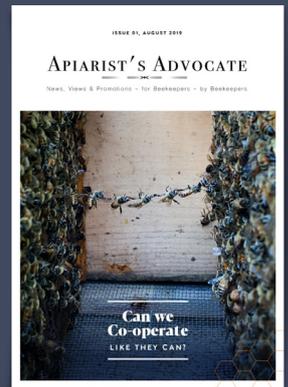
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