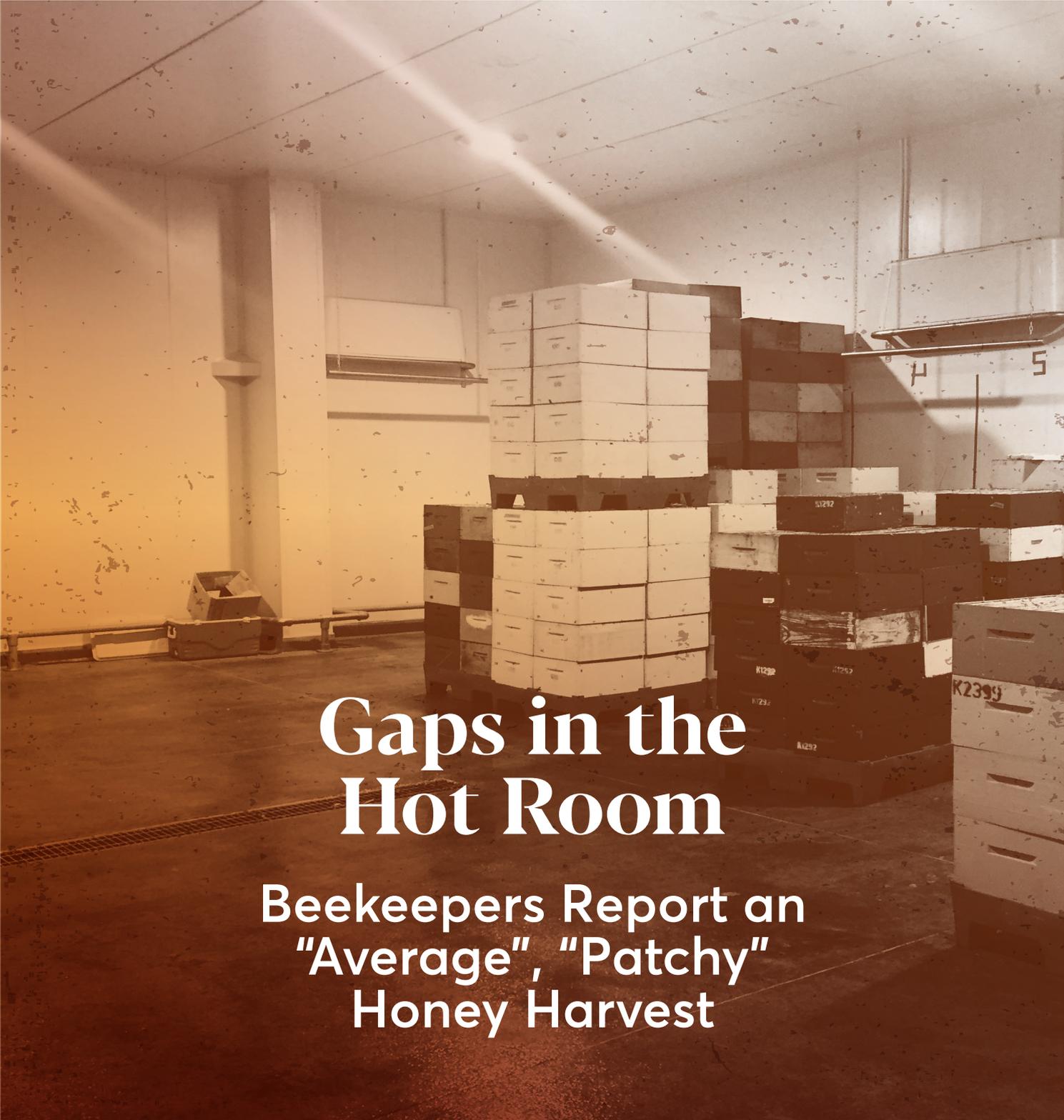


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APIARIST'S ADVOCATE



News, Views & Promotions - for Beekeepers - by Beekeepers



Gaps in the Hot Room

Beekeepers Report an "Average", "Patchy" Honey Harvest

Honey Yields Return to Average



Beekeepers from around New Zealand are reporting the current honey season's yields as close to the long-term average, following on from a lucrative national harvest the previous summer. A range of commercial beekeeping operations, from both North and South Islands, were canvassed for their opinion on the honey harvest so far. Reports of some regions and floral varieties performing well were tempered with many other areas offering greatly reduced production, including in manuka honey.

Terms such as "average", "patchy" and "fickle" have been used by beekeepers to describe the honey harvest so far in season 2020-21.

With honey still being brought into extraction sheds, total quantities are yet to be determined for most commercial operations, but indications are that yields will fall well below those of last season's record national crop.

Approximately 27,000 tonnes of honey was harvested in the bumper 2019-20 season, at an average of 31.1kg per hive, as estimated by the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI). With beekeepers indicating the 2020-21 season will see a return to closer to average yields, that could see the national honey crop drop to closer to 20,000 tonnes, especially if total hive numbers are reduced for a second consecutive year.

Most beekeepers canvassed about the season were not willing to make a final call as to the "quality" of their manuka honey crop, as they await full test results from labs. However, preliminary indications are that cool weather conditions, along with strong flowerings in competing fauna, may have limited peroxide activity levels.

NORTH ISLAND

In many cases the mood of North Island beekeepers was split between east and west sides of the island, with many in the east and even central areas experiencing poor honey yields. Conversely, Taranaki, in the west, appears to have performed better than most seasons.

For Egmont Honey, named for the mountain which towers over the region, Taranaki might have been the best place to have hives, but it was far from a brilliant manuka season.

"Most people I have talked to say the Taranaki has sort of been the only place that has fired, but that has been patchy too," Egmont Honey's Mark Thomas says.

"Flying over, one gully might be white with manuka flower, but then the next green."

Cool weather from late October through December limited production of bush honeys in many areas of the North Island, while changeable and cooler than normal weather during manuka flowering in December made for a short window for honey collection of the valuable crop.

"It has been really weird. It depends on where you are, one side of a hill has gone great, then the other, nothing," Thomas says.

Tarata Honey owner Raul Mateas-Orban, who keeps hives and operates a contract extraction and packing facility in Inglewood, Taranaki, says he expects the honey take to be well down on last season, but that does not mean it has been bad, overall.

"This season, the productivity is probably 60 to 70 percent of last season. There are some areas where it might be the same, but definitely not everywhere. The manuka is not blooming as well. At the end of the day, it is not possible to complain though," Mateas-Orban says.

The contract extractor and packer says the beekeepers he has spoken to describe a patchy honey season.

"I talked to some people in the Coromandel who had a better season than ever, in a sheltered valley, but then someone else in Paengaroa, nothing, Wairarapa, nothing. Then someone else in Wairarapa, in a sheltered spot close to the Tararuas, and they get two boxes of honey," Mateas-Orban says.

At Tweeddales Honey in Taihape, centrally located in the North Island, owner Don Tweeddale says their manuka honey take is likely to be down about 30 percent on last season, and the early season bush honey harvest was poor.

"Taranaki is a bit later flowering, but anything that flowered in November, December, such as kamahi and rewarewa, it had weather issues. Not so much heavy rain, but cool and cloudy weather, not getting above 20 degrees [Celsius].

That is no good for honey flow," Tweeddale says.

In Northland, where manuka flowers early in the season, beekeepers have reported a poor season (as detailed in *Northland's Damp Squib* in the January issue of *Apiarist's Advocate*).



Kintail Honey has hives across much of the North Island, and owner James Ward says the fickle weather through the Christmas and New Year period limited their manuka honey take, especially on the southern East Coast. However, with warmer weather in January and February the clover honey harvest looks positive, something South Island beekeepers are also reporting.

SOUTH ISLAND

A late season surge in the clover crop in Otago will help buffer the honey sheds of some South Island beekeepers, but others chasing manuka honey have been hurt by unfavourable weather in December.

Taylor Pass Honey Company runs thousands of hives across the mainland and a contract extraction facility in Marlborough. Operations manager Rex Butt says they too have been challenged by patchy manuka flowering and some of their extraction clients have been hit hard.

"All our extraction customers are saying the same thing, and some are quite despondent. One guy, who has been at it a long time, says it is undoubtedly the worst season he has had," Butt says.

"It has been patchy. We have had manuka coming through in areas where we haven't before, whereas some of our reliable areas were all done and dusted before it warmed up. The pre-Christmas weather killed us. It was hopeless.

"Last year we had about 20 percent of our crop in by Christmas time, whereas this season there was nothing."

The Marlborough Sounds and east coast of the South Island appear to have been poor performers for manuka honey, while some areas of the West Coast, including the Lewis Pass, flowered well but cool weather meant only average yields.

Rainbow Honey, who has operations spread between Nelson, Marlborough and the West Coast, are expecting an "average" season overall, head beekeeper Trent Connor says.

"It was very regional this year. Those who were spread out might have done all right, those in Marlborough will be struggling," Connor says.

The West Coast saw the southern rata flower strongly, the first time in around four years, and this helped increase total honey take. However, the flowering period overlapped with manuka and kanuka so there are some concerns it could affect manuka honey quality.

Also increasing yields has been the late season clover crop in Otago, with Marsh's Honey owner Russell Marsh saying the clover flowering was strong early, due to a lot of moisture in the ground. However, it has taken until late in the season, and warmer and drier conditions, to present prosperous nectar flows.

"Most of the reports are coming back that it is better than we thought it was going to be a month ago," Marsh says.

Like around much of the country, Marsh says the word "average" has been on the lips of most apiarists in Otago and Southland.

"I was at a discussion group recently and the consensus was it will be fairly average, not stellar but not a disgrace and the manuka has been pretty average too." 🐝

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Big Buzz Draws the Crowds



The inaugural Big Buzz Festival has lived up to its name, drawing crowds and gaining praise following a successful event on February 14 in Matakana north of Auckland.



Michelin Star winning chef Cory Campbell drew in a large audience with his cooking demonstration using various honeys at the Big Buzz Festival.

Almost 2400 people attended the celebration of all things honeybee, organised by local beekeepers Isabella Sullivan and Grass Esposti and held at Matakana School.

Both impending rain clouds and swirling concerns of Covid-19 held off just long enough for the family-friendly festival to host a range of stalls, events, entertainments and speakers pertaining to honeybees and other pollinators. The day following the festival the Auckland region moved into a three-day level 3 Covid-19 lockdown, which would have caused the Big Buzz to be cancelled if it came into effect 24 hours earlier.

"We had a great day and it is a shame to have had the Covid news so soon after, as it has taken the focus off the event a bit," Sullivan says.

"A lot of people are talking about how lucky we were to get away with all of it, as opposed to how good the festival was, which is



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what everyone was saying on the day. Everyone was excited and happy and it was a really good day."

The organisers expected between 1500 and 2000 attendees, but with almost 2400 passing through the gates they were happy with the turnout. About 85 percent of attendees lived in Matakana or nearby, such as Auckland, according to sample information gathered, Sullivan says.

One of those in attendance was Apiculture New Zealand chief executive Karin Kos who praised the event.

"It's a great story and it was a great day," Kos says.

"It was fantastic to see the community and wider interest in New Zealand honey and bees.

"I loved being able to listen to various beekeepers engage with the public and explain how they harvested their honey and what was special about it. That is the engagement we need and the connections made were good.

"It was well organised in a great location. It showcased New Zealand honey well, not just manuka, and I love to see those local honey stories get told," Kos says.

While the inaugural event was organised on a shoestring budget by Sullivan and Esposti, whose own time was not compensated, they hope to have created a festival they can replicate again next year and potentially attract more backers.

"Considering our marketing budget and limitations, I think we have done really well," Sullivan says, following a year of planning in which Covid concerns were never far from their or other stakeholders' minds.



Among the dignitaries at the Big Buzz Festival were, from left, Greg Sayers of Auckland Council, Darrel Goosen Matakana School Principal, festival co-directors Grass Esposti and Isabella Sullivan, Apiculture New Zealand chief executive Karin Kos and Ringi Brown of Ngati Manuhiri.

"There were a lot of things that made people hazardous. We were lucky to put together what we did and deliver what we did. Now, hopefully we can go to sponsors and say 'hey, our first festival brought in 2400 people' and build on that," Sullivan says.

If the event is to go ahead again next year, it will likely be in the same location but at a later date in the summer so as to give more beekeepers opportunity to attend.

For now though, the organisers' attentions have turned to post-event work such as reviewing feedback received. With the festival being so successful, that is a task Sullivan is looking forward to.

"It was a great day out. I wished there was three of me to enjoy it more and see everything," Sullivan says, adding, "I am vicariously doing that through comments and feedback from everyone." 🐝

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Building Backyard Bees



Every beekeeping operation is unique and in Nelson, Backyard Bees is more diverse than most, with honey production, hive rentals and, in more recent years, contract extraction services. Wendy Lane explains how, along with husband Andrew, they have built their business from the ground up, going from just one hive 12 years ago to over 500 and a diverse and sustainable operation now.

A property purchase in 2009 gave the Lanes something to build on, in more ways than one. Their rural block of land in Wakefield allowed husband Andrew, a builder by trade, to construct their new home, but also provided the foundations from which a multi-faceted beekeeping business has arisen.

"The previous owner had a hive on site which we inherited and it grew from there," Wendy Lane says.

"One hive becomes two, two hives become four and all of a sudden you have a small beekeeping business."

Soon Backyard Bees was purchased to supplement their existing honey hives. The backyard hive-rental service had been created by an established local beekeeper as an add-on to his operation and the Lanes saw an opportunity to grow it.

Several hundred of their hives are now rented by landowners across the Nelson, Tasman and St Arnaud areas, who pay an annual rental fee and in return have their hive managed throughout the year and receive 10kg of honey. The Lanes employ one other beekeeper.

The Backyard Bees aspect of their business makes it very different to most other beekeeping operations in New Zealand, but Lane says they have adapted their methods to provide an appropriate service. That includes having two fully enclosed 3-tonne trucks to help keep "stray" bees off their vehicles.

"You don't want to be sitting at traffic lights and have bees leaking out. That sort of safety and perception to the general public is paramount, so we do everything we can to be good beekeeping citizens. We don't travel with uncovered loads, we keep things clean. We are going onto people's properties so there is a high level of respect needed."

Lane says both her and Andrew are people-persons and so interacting with a range of customers is an enjoyable part of their roles.

"Our type of beekeeping is quite different to having 50 hives in a paddock and only so much time to get the job done. Having the customers on site is all part of it. You are able to show them what is going on in their hives and they get a greater understanding of what the bees are doing, how the weather is affecting them and how what they are doing in their garden is affecting the bees."

Of course, having bees that match that friendly attitude is important too, so they mostly breed their own from calm hives. Beekeeping on the Backyard Bees hives is carried

An enclosed truck helps Andrew and Wendy Lane offer a more client-friendly service when visiting their Backyard Bees hives in the Nelson area.



out on good weather days, to reduce aggression from the bees.

As the Backyard Bees side of their business has grown, the Lanes have seen need to further build on their property, adding an extraction plant six years ago.



Wendy Lane, busy at one of her Backyard Bees' sites in Nelson.

"We wanted to start our own plant so as to guarantee the honey we were delivering to customers was from the same suburb or region in which they live, so they are eating their local honey," Lane says.

They now operate the extraction plant as a stand-alone business, Tasman Honey Ltd.

"Once we built the plant, we found there was a gap in the market in that a lot of smaller commercial beekeepers or hobbyists might not have anywhere to get their honey extracted. Now, over the years, our own operation has got bigger and some of those beekeeper's operations have also got bigger. So, we have expanded the plant and made things more streamlined and innovative. We also do some packing work too."

Backyard Bees, who sells honey both in bulk and locally in retail stores, has not been immune from a drop in honey prices in recent seasons. However, Lane says they have a business that has been built to endure and with a plan to see them through until retirement.

"There have been some lean years, but we are entrenched in it now and will stick with it.

"What has kept us going is some solid relationships, built over all these years, plus expansion and growth without borrowing. We have always been mindful of carrying out projects, improving things, but doing it within our means and not over capitalising," Lane says.



Andrew Lane,
Backyard Bees owner
and beekeeper.

Twelve years on from having bought their land, their choice of property, with beehive included, looks a wise selection.

"The property we bought we built a house on it, have built a business and raised our kids. I don't see us moving for quite a while," Lane says, adding "It has worked out well." 

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– A Beekeeper's Profile



BY MAGGIE JAMES

At Ellesmere Apiaries in Leeston, Canterbury, Paul Ridden has forged a beekeeping career of over 50 years. Now in his 60s, Ridden's career has gone from the honey house of Airborne Honey in his school holidays, to Canadian excursions, his own beekeeping business and, most recently, a contract honey creaming and packing plant. Fellow Canterbury beekeeper *Maggie James* caught up with Ridden to explore his beekeeping past and latest venture.

Ridden has built his skills and expertise in the industry over many years and, as a Canterbury beekeeper myself, I first crossed paths with him more than 20 years ago.

Now, hurtling towards retirement and seeking less physical work, he has branched out into his own home-based packing and creaming service. The brand-new plant is NP1 domestic market certified, with machinery manufactured at Gloriavale on the West Coast.

Ridden expects high demand for the service, as many smaller commercial outfits and hobbyists run into difficulties scheduling honey packing and creaming for domestic market consumption.

It's the latest in a long line of experiences in the honey industry for the Cantabrian.

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Ridden's first job at Airborne Honey was afternoons when school finished in the early 1970s. Prior to honey drum introduction and without hydraulic machinery, beekeepers supplied honey in 60lb cans (kerosene tin size) to buyers. Forty cans equaled one ton and they were slowly hoisted in lots of ten to the upstairs oven room. Gravity pumped honey downstairs to the packing room.

Daily quota for the oven room – 60 cans, and once emptied they needed to be sent back downstairs. Quickest option was Tony Tairaoa, factory manager, throwing cans out the upstairs window one by one, with a young Ridden running back and forth catching before these hit the ground damaged! Good practise for 'Ridd the Kidd' and his years fielding in Canterbury Country representative cricket. For reuse he cleaned, spot weld repaired, and baled the tins into bundles using wire.

By 1973 and "Ridd's" 15th birthday, Airborne co-founder Arthur Gosset took him on as a permanent full-timer in creaming and packing honey, learning superior quality skills. Many customers returned their 5lb empty tins for refills. Honey was also packed into 14oz drinking glasses with metal lids, and 1lb cardboard waxed pottles.

His next stint was as Airborne truck driver, which came with some new challenges. Some Christchurch delivery docks under buildings were without turning bays, which meant reversing the TK Bedford down long twisting tunnels. Much preferred were rural pickups from numerous Canterbury beekeepers, collecting 100 to 300, 60lb when full, tins per trip.



Paul Ridden with his new honey creaming and packing equipment, a service he is offering to fellow Canterbury beekeepers as his career moves from the hives towards the honey house.

Airborne Honey ran 5000 hives for cut comb and bulk honey and in the late 1970's Gosset, Ridden and Barry Sheehan were teamed in the Leeston area, running 1600 hives, plus grafting yard and hundreds of five-frame queen-rearing nucs.



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Gosset started teaching the boys in lighting a smoker and progressed to all required aspects of beekeeping, along with specialised info – much of which at the time was not scientifically proven.

Team transport was a 1950 manual Austin commercial truck with the boys vying not to sit middle seat – Arthur's gear changes proved rugged on the neck.

By the early 1990's 'Ridd the Kidd' had progressed to become Leeston beekeeping team leader with two staff.

He also worked two southern hemisphere winters in Alberta, Canada, which opened his eyes to many new beekeeping practises. Hive mortality, due to extreme winters, was high. Receiving numerous package bees and queens from New Zealand, Ridden's job, along with two other Kiwis, was getting hives going and ready for pollination of canola, brassicas, and sweet clover. Working the next full season at Airborne in New Zealand ensured retention of trained staff, and the Canterbury business would then refund Ridden's air tickets to Canada from months earlier.

Mid-1990s and while still at Airborne, Ridden was already keeping 200 hives of his own which, when combined with purchase of 500 more from Warren Hantz, gave him scale to branch out on his own. A full-time business specialising in honey production and seed pollination followed.

The biggest earner in those days was clover honey cut comb, the equivalent of the manuka boom, and it allowed Ridden to build his business before the domestic and export comb honey market became saturated, turning belly-up in the early 2000s.

For 22 years, Ridden has been found, most Sundays, at Riccarton Market, in Christchurch, selling his honey. He has constantly perfected creaming and packing, keeping up to date with the latest food and safety edicts, while decreasing hive numbers to now just a few sites to supply product to himself.

Ridden's career has gone somewhat full circle, as he now spends much of his time in the honey house once again. This time it is his own plant though, and he offers his honey creaming and packaging services to small commercial or hobbyist beekeepers in the area.

It's a service which comes with plenty of experience and, as I found out, a good beekeeping yarn or two as well. 🐝

The range of Ellesmere Honey varieties packed using Ridden's new plant.



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A Sting in the Tale is a new monthly segment featuring stories of beekeeping mishaps. From accidents in the field, characters encountered, to nasty stings or just being in the wrong place at the wrong time, like this “better work story” from West Auckland beekeeper Chris Northcott.

“Hands Up!”



BY CHRIS NORTHCOTT

The most unexpected thing happened to me while beekeeping one late summer afternoon, at one of my bush sites in the Waitakere Ranges of West Auckland.

Harvest time was finished and my hives were getting their twice-annual brood checks and varroa treatments. The day was warm, but not hot, and I was in my own world, focussed on getting my hives done so I could head home for the day.

A voice through the trees shouted at me: “Come out of the bushes or we’ll set the dog on you!”

‘What the heck?’ I thought, so “What?!” I shouted back impatiently.



The path to Chris Northcott’s West Auckland apiary at which he was rudely interrupted by members of the Thin Blue Line.

I was a little confused and didn’t really have the bother to stop my work. I wasn’t even certain it was talking to me – I could see no one and wasn’t quite sure which direction it had come from.

“Come out of the bush or we’ll set the dog on you!”, demanded the voice again.

“Who are you?”, I shouted back. Now I was less annoyed and more confused by the interruption.

“Police!” replied the voice.

‘What is going on?’ I wondered. Since I had actually just finished at that moment, I picked up my smoker and an empty hive box and walked down the little track back to the road. Emerging through the trees I looked down on the road and found that I was faced by four police officers. Another police car was rolling up a nearby driveway.

My first assumption was that there must be something bad going down in the area and they needed to clear innocent civilians, like me, out of harm’s way. All four faces peering back at me were somewhere between amused and incredulous.

As I stood on the bank above the road, fully kitted in my bee suit, the lead officer spoke first: “I guess it’s pretty obvious but, what are you doing?”

It turned out that a neighbour had seen me roll up in my truck, put on a suspicious looking outfit, and then disappear into the bush near someone else’s house. They called the police, who dispatched no less than three patrol cars carrying at least five officers, tasers ready at the belt.

As it turned out, the dog I had been threatened with was a bit of a bluff as the dog handler was still on his way. I was pleased to hear them promptly call HQ to let them know he wasn’t needed after all!

The officers looked as though this had all been a disappointing waste of time. It probably didn’t end up especially high on their list of best work stories, but it is good to know our men and women in blue are vigilant to keep the Waitakere Ranges clear of suspicious people such as myself. They left me with what will certainly remain my number one beekeeping work story for many years to come!

**Chris Northcott is a small commercial beekeeper based in West Auckland producing the Don Buck Honey label. 🐝*

What’s your best beekeeping yarn? We’d love to hear your beekeeping tale of humour or misfortune. Email: editor@apiadvocate.co.nz



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***Under the Microscope* is a new regular feature detailing science and research in the apiculture industry, brought to you by dnature. In this first instalment, dnature general manager Belinda Mackay provides detail on the company and an exciting new AFB test kit that allows beekeepers to test their hives with one simple swab.**

dnature diagnostics and research is a New Zealand owned DNA diagnostic business that specialises in DNA testing using a technique called qPCR. This technique is one that readers may now be familiar with because of publicity around testing of Covid-19.

Our expertise in this technique has resulted in dnature being involved in a wide variety of industries, ranging from developing testing for the kiwifruit PSA bacteria, the wine and beer industry through to developing tests for Covid-19.

Our business is particularly interested in the apiculture industry with our technical manager, John, a hobbyist beekeeper himself. This interest has resulted in dnature being at the forefront of research in the apiculture industry.

Our involvement in the industry ranges from the tests offered in our lab, to providing DNA test kits that we have developed to other

laboratories and honey producers, as well as undertaking research on various viruses, pathogens and bacteria that affect bees.

Back in 2014 we were the first laboratory to discover the existence of *lotmaria passim* in New Zealand. This virus, along with nosemas, is a major contributor to over-wintering loss in hives and its discovery led to the development of a variety of different tests that beekeepers can now access to test their hive health. These tests are also supplied to testing laboratories around New Zealand, along with our test that was developed for American Foulbrood (AFB).

Beekeepers will be familiar with AFB, a bacterial disease that, if found in hives, must be reported to the AFB management agency and the hives destroyed.

Currently beekeepers are able to get their bees and honey tested for AFB, but the process does mean dismantling the hive, which takes time and effort. Our new sampling method for AFB, named the AFB Foster Method, can be carried out without disturbing the hive, as swabbing occurs at the hive entrance.

The Foster Method has taken several years to develop to ensure that it is as sensitive as the process of testing bees or honey. Because we have validated the test extensively, we are now able to launch the test with confidence. If you're wondering why we have called the test the Foster Method, it's because the earliest user and supporter of the method was Barry Foster, a member of the AFB Management Board and a current AP2.

If beekeepers are interested, they can contact us at orders@dnature.co.nz to request a sample pack (with sampling instructions) and the link to our submission form. Any technical questions can be sent to john@dnature.co.nz 

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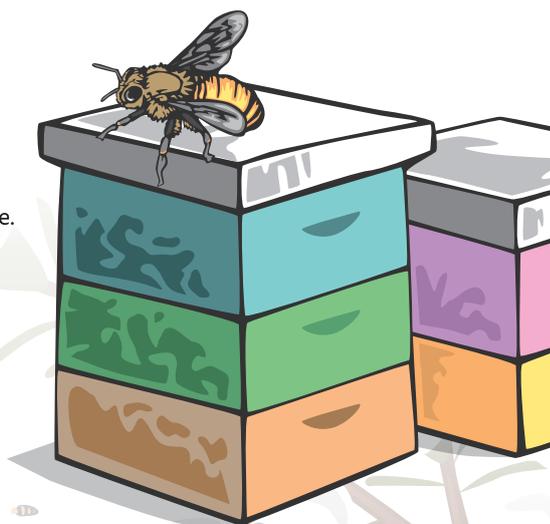
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The B52 and Productivity



BY IAN FLETCHER

The past weekend in the Wairarapa saw the Wings over Wairarapa airshow, complete with visiting (and impressive) B52 bomber from the US Air Force. Which occasioned some (at times passionate) discussion in the supermarket along the lines whether military aircraft were ever welcome given their destructive purpose.

This raises the question whether New Zealand wants to be genuinely responsible for its own defence, and so be able to genuinely claim to have an independent foreign policy. I've written on this before, and my view is that if you can't make a serious claim to defend yourself then your independence is compromised, whatever you say. In New Zealand's case it means Australia defends us, and we must expect to bow the knee on anything that really matters in Canberra. Given what a decent country Australia is, it's an easy price to pay, compared to buying a decent navy and air force.

But the relationship with Australia always raises the question of trans-Tasman migration, and the number of New Zealanders who make happy, productive and successful lives in Australia, and (to

a less extent) in the UK. Economic thinking is starting to identify (among many other problems) a shortage of high-quality jobs in developed countries. Automation, artificial intelligence, and the growing use of robots all contribute. The automation of work in accounting, the law, and software eats away at 'middle class' opportunity, just as robots might erode 'working class' work.

If we have too few jobs, then people feel short-changed, angry and alienated. There's some thinking that this contributes to the rise of extremist politics. It may also make societies less welcoming to immigrants. New Zealanders in Australia already face a restricted set of welfare rights.

Covid-19 is bringing many New Zealanders home. A less safe and welcoming environment in Australia would speed that up. It would leave many New Zealanders with less opportunity, pushed back onto our crowded and sclerotic housing market. Not to mention the pressure on schools and hospitals. Looking after people properly if we can't export surplus labour might be something else we need to do for harmony at home, and to allow ourselves to have a genuinely independent foreign policy. Finding everyone meaningful work then also becomes especially important. As the economist Paul Krugman said, "Productivity isn't everything, but in the long run, it's almost everything". We've got some hard thinking ahead of us.

Ian Fletcher is a former chief executive of the UK Patents Office, free trade negotiator with the European Commission, biosecurity expert for the Queensland government and head of New Zealand's security agency. These days he is a commercial flower grower in the Wairarapa and consultant to the apiculture industry through both the Manuka Charitable Trust and NZ Beekeeping Inc. 🐝

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Southern North Island Beekeeping Group Reaches Half Century



Over its now 50 years of existence the Southern North Island Beekeeping Group (SNIBG) has seen plenty of changes in their ranks and in the beekeeping industry, but some things remain the same, including some foundation members. One thing that has been a constant is regular field days to help educate beekeepers and so the group invites any beekeepers, members or not, to bring a suit and take part in their field day in Manakau, south of Levin, on Sunday March 14.

While the SNIBG has at times been a pressure group on certain industry issues, at their core they exist to educate beekeepers. So, getting back to hosting field days, after their two planned for 2020 did not go ahead due to Covid-19 uncertainties, is important this year.

On March 14 experienced beekeepers will take the group through hives and the Manakau Hall will play host to several presentations, including from the American Foulbrood (AFB) Management Agency's Dwayne Hill.

The club also meets once a month to hold general discussions around beekeeping and the industry. Frank Lindsay, now in his 70s, has been coming to the meetings and field days for 50 years.

"I was working at the post office in the early days and I used to take a day's leave to go to meetings. I learnt more at the lunch time discussions, when commercial beekeepers would answer your questions, or I would listen in on conversations. Well, that same thing is happening today. We get the business of the group over with quickly and then the discussions begin, 'have you noticed this?', 'I've got this problem in the hives, do you?' and so on," Lindsay says.



While membership is open to anyone in New Zealand, at only \$10 per annum, the group is based in the North Island south of White Cliffs, Mt Ruapehu and Woodville.

Lindsay, along with wife Mary-Ann and Allan Richards are founding members who all remain in the group, which was originally formed as a branch of the National Beekeeping Association (NBA) and named the South Western District. In 1989 the name was changed to the Southern North Island branch of the NBA.

With the NBA's transition into Apiculture New Zealand (ApiNZ) in 2016 the group's members gave the new national body two years



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to prove themselves, before ultimately deciding they were best to remain independent of both ApiNZ and the recently formed New Zealand Beekeeping Inc.

"Some people didn't want to go one way, some didn't want to go the other. If we had aligned ourselves with either body it would have split our group up," Lindsay explains.

Therefore, the original SNIBG remains, now with approximately 80 members and a mix of commercial and hobby beekeepers. While educating beekeepers is at the heart of their group, they also delve into industry matters and have met with the Minister for Primary Industries several times.

They were instrumental in speaking out against a proposed honey producers' levy in 2019 and ran a campaign which helped see that levy voted down by beekeepers. With a vote due in 2023 on another levy paid by beekeepers – that used to fund the AFB National Pest Management Plan – Lindsay says the SNIBG are promoting a thorough discussion, but have yet to take a stance on the issue.

As well as twice-annual field days, in a usual year, the group also hosts a "Buzz Weekend" every three years. Held at Camp Rangiwoods outside of Palmerston North, the focus of the weekend is instructing new beekeepers.

Last year the Buzz Weekend took place in February, but no field days followed. Now, in its 50th year the SNIBG is excited to get back to hosting field days and continuing to educate. They invite anyone who is interested to come along to Manakau Hall on March 14 and bring their beesuit. 🐝



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We Need Your Samples

Kiwi beekeepers can easily do their bit to help solve a major trading problem, simply by supplying some honey samples, says Waikato University scientist Dr Megan Grainger.

Grainger is carrying out crucial research into better understanding diastase levels in New Zealand monofloral honeys. Low diastase readings have become a barrier to getting Kiwi honeys into European markets, and so the honey scientist wants to determine unique aspects of monofloral honeys that might be causing the problem.

Diastase is commonly used as a measure for determining whether honey has been overheated in the ageing process, but many New Zealand monoflorals naturally test poorly.

To carry out her work, Grainger needs a wide range of either multifloral or monofloral honey samples, from all over New Zealand, and would like beekeepers to help by sending some to her Waikato University lab. In return, beekeepers will be supplied results of any testing carried out on their honey samples.

Samples can be from any region, but must be from the most recent, 2020-21, honey season.

Grainger's work is being carried out in association with work of Auckland-based The Experiment Company into the "potency" of kanuka honey and the potential for a new honey rating system, as detailed in the December 2020 issue of *Apiarist's Advocate*.

Details

Samples of approximately 50g can be sent to:

University of Waikato
Science Store
Gate 8, Hillcrest Road
Hamilton
New Zealand
Attention: Megan Grainger
megan.grainger@waikato.ac.nz

The following details are required: floral type, date of collection, location of hive (e.g. Hillcrest, Hamilton, or GPS), land type (e.g. urban, bush, farm, orchard). Plus your contact details.

If you want to discuss your samples before sending them, please email Megan: megan.grainger@waikato.ac.nz.

Or to discuss the work of The Experiment Company and providing them additional samples, contact Sunil Pinnamaneni, sunil@experiment.nz 🐝

Promising Varroa Resistance Research from Otago



BY ROD WILLIAMS,
HIVE WORLD BEEKEEPING SUPPLIES

The varroa problem would be one of the major issues that the New Zealand beekeeper faces in hive management – both in time to treat and in cost. I would estimate Kiwi beekeepers would spend up to \$7 million on synthetic varroa treatments every spring and autumn – up to \$14 million per year. This is not to mention having to dispose of all those toxic strips (hopefully safely) or the fact that the mite is known to build up resistance to these chemicals. Alternative treatments are helpful, but also can have safety issues either for the user or the bees themselves.

I believe that any investigation into dealing with this mite should be encouraged and promoted. If we could help the bees to clean this scourge themselves, it would be a great advantage. There was

a beekeeper on the West Coast who claimed he was breeding varroa resistant bees. However, no-one in influential positions really took him seriously or supported the idea.

Now we hear that University of Otago research reveals that the bee's own sense of smell may give them a fighting chance against this parasite. Bees have 170 odour receptors, up to 40 times more sensitive than that of a human. This is how they tell which flowers have pollen and nectar.

The Otago University researchers have found (as our West-Coaster found) that some colonies show resistance to varroa. For these colonies, varroa infestation triggers a strong behaviour response in the bees known as varroa sensitive hygiene behaviour (VSH). VSH is exhibited by worker bees who uncap infested brood cells and kill the developing bee and then remove all cell contents including the mites. Doing this interrupts the mite's reproductive cycle.

Researcher Fanny Mondet from the National Institute of Agriculture in Avignon, France, is currently working with the University of Otago and has identified six varroa-related compounds that trigger VSH behaviour. These compounds are found in varroa infested brood cells and their levels provide a reliable indicator of the numbers of juvenile mites present in the cells.

Obviously a lot more work will need to be done, but I believe that this could be a turning point in our ongoing fight to cope with this unwanted parasite.

Further information can be found on the Otago University website: www.otago.ac.nz/news/news/otago824263.html 

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Healthy Bee, Sick Bee. The Influence of Parasites, Pathogens, Predators and Pesticides on Honey Bees.

BY DR PHIL LESTER

Publisher: Victoria University of Wellington Press
Availability: Hard copy, \$30, through Victoria University Press, vup.victoria.ac.nz, electronic copy, \$15, through www.mebooks.co.nz
Reviewed by: Patrick Dawkins

The introductory chapter to Phil Lester's latest book, *Healthy Bee, Sick Bee*, states, "The goal to 'save the bees' is admirable, but how can we do more?" Over 200 pages later it concludes with the author asking the reader, if given \$100 to spend on honey bee health, "how would you spend the money?"

Everything in the eight chapters between is designed to equip the reader to better answer that question.

It is a thought experiment that challenges the reader to review the comprehensive range of afflictions affecting honey bees which Lester, a professor of ecology and entomology at Victoria University of Wellington, has well detailed.

Many of the subjects are controversial and have been considerably debated in other forums (can we eradicate American foulbrood from New Zealand? How do various pesticides affect honey bees?). Lester does the leg work of researching such topics and provides the reader a comprehensive summary of the facts – those proven by science.

Some of the subject matter is perhaps less well known or discussed by the Kiwi beekeeper, such as the individual chapters which tackle viruses, pathogens and predators. *Healthy Bee*

provides both a sound overview and sufficient detail on what is lurking out there though and it will help make for far more prepared beekeepers.

Sometimes the level of detail provided does not make for the easiest reading and I frequently found myself flicking back pages to remember what some of the many acronyms represented (CBPV anyone? Perhaps some IAPV? ... AKI-complex viruses?). In most instances, Lester appears acutely aware of when the subject matter might be getting 'into the weeds' of deep science though. So, the book is sprinkled with lines of humour which, although you won't hear a stand-up comic bringing down the house with them, are quite witty and do serve the purpose of breaking up what, otherwise, would make for heavier reading.

Despite this, one must have a deep interest in beekeeping, the plight of the honey bee or apiculture more broadly to read from cover to cover, while those with a more passive interest in the honey bee could still find much value in several of the well-defined chapters.

Lester draws on historic occurrences, such as various colony collapses through the years, as well as research old and new to detail many of the complex issues which impact bee health. While most of these studies are global, Lester makes a point of bringing analysis back to a New Zealand perspective.

While it will make for a useful reference if kept on the beekeeper's bookshelf, *Healthy Bee's* greatest value is as a learning material read thoroughly once. To this end, it may at times make for heavy reading, but the Kiwi beekeeper who sticks with it will be rewarded with a deeper understanding of the most significant threats to their livestock's health. 🐝



Neville Marr

Chartered Accountant

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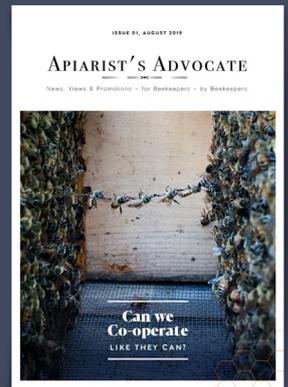
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