AUSTRALIAN BEE JOURNAL

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Program & Speakers

• Honey bee viruses	Emily Remnant (via zoom)
• Molecular testing for AFB	Olivia Ducommun-Dit-Verron
• Varroa update	Elizabeth Frost
• Heat treatment for varroa	Mike Allerton
• Speech-to-text record keeping	Liz Barbour
• Chemistry of Honey	Liz Barbour
• Sweet Distinction: Elevate your honey brand	Jessica Locarnini
• Winning honey competitions	Peter Adams
• Food safety & compliance	Angelique Drew
• How honeybee swarms relocate	Tino Corsetti
• Winter welfare for your bees	Stephen Davey
• Reliable Requeening	Andrew Wootton
• Generate income from beekeeping	Tony Wilsmore

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The VAA was founded in 1892 and is the peak body for beekeeping in Victoria.
The Association advocates to federal, state, and local governments to protect and improve Victoria's honey resources and to ensure beekeepers' interests are safeguarded and promoted.
We work to secure effective legislation and encourage scientific investigation and research in all aspects of beekeeping.
Our achievements include:

- Introducing the Victorian Apiary Code of Practice allowing bees to be kept in urban areas
- Contributing to the new Apiculture on Public Lands Policy through our involvement with the Buzz Committee
- Working with Plant Health Australia which contributed to the development of the Australian Biosecurity Code of Practice.

The VAA advocates for the beekeeping industry on behalf of all beekeepers in Victoria.

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Recreational beekeeping
John van Weeghel

All beekeepers and interested groups are welcome to join the VAA.
Membership benefits include:

- The VAA's monthly magazine *Australian Bee Journal* (ABJ) including one free classified ad per year
- Access to the members' only section of the VAA website www.vicbeekeepers.com.au
- Discounts for beekeeping services and products, including insurance
- Borrowing rights to the extensive VAA library
- Voting rights at VAA regional group meetings and the annual VAA state conference
- Opportunity to participate in and contribute to VAA sub-committees
- Opportunity to meet and share ideas with other beekeepers at local group meetings, field days, shows and conferences
- Opportunity to contribute to advocacy to government and development of policy on beekeeping

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How to join
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or email
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to request a membership form.

www.vicbeekeepers.com.au

AUSTRALIAN BEE JOURNAL

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Cover photo: Jamie Trimby.
Illawarra flame tree (brachychiton acerifolius)

Deadline for copy for the April 2025 journal is
10pm on Tuesday 1st of April 2025.

The Australian Bee Journal seeks to publish contributions dealing with all aspects of beekeeping.
Statements expressed by contributors do not necessarily reflect the views of the VAA Inc or the editor.
Editor: Annette Engstrom

Contact the Editor for ads, photos, classifieds and article information

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President's Report

APLEG update.

In the December President's report I reported that DEECA had cancelled APLEG. This group had members from the beekeeping industry and DEECA, and provided a means to discuss and resolve beesites and beekeeping issues. Achievements from this group include an agreement to reissue beesites that were archived, and the implementation of a policy that would give beekeepers the opportunity to apply for new beesites to be created. These were major achievements and allowed industry to expand. Now we need APLEG as there are unresolved issues, like beesites marked incorrectly on the DEECA maps creating issues between beekeepers and DEECA, and between beekeepers. Unfortunately, we again have seen devastating fires this summer with some 150 beesites on Public Land lost. Beekeepers that lost hives and sites in these fires need assistance to help them through the years that the forest needs to recover. The Board is very appreciative that after some lobbying the Victorian Minister of Agriculture, the Honorable Ross Spence, has agreed to meet with the VAA Board. We are very hopeful that the meeting will lead to the return of APLEG or similar, and some positive support for beekeepers during this time of uncertainty.

The spread of Varroa in Victoria.

All beekeepers in Victoria will be aware that Varroa is now present here in Victoria. After the initial period of eradication, the practice of destroying and burning hives was stopped. Varroa is now managed according to the T2M plan, which was agreed to by all states and the 27 parties that had signed up and paid for the eradiation plan. The outcome of this is that Varroa will gradually spread across Victoria in the same way it has spread across the world. We all understand that varroa is spread by the bees and the beekeepers' relocating hives. I ask that we encourage beekeepers with Varroa to report a positive test and the movement of these infected hives. This will result in beekeepers having the option to avoid an area with infected hives. Without the encouragement and support, beekeepers may well avoid reporting positive tests, resulting in the possibility of having Varroa infested hives in your area without your knowledge.

Recreational Conference.

At the time you receive this March ABJ you may have one or two days still to register for the Recreational Conference. Andrew Wootton and his team have put together an excellent program covering topics for beginner beekeepers as well as master beekeepers and commercial operators. The Conference is at a stunning purpose-built education venue with morning and afternoon teas provided as well as lunch. A small number of traders will be presenting their wares as well as an AgVic information desk. This conference will provide you with information needed to be prepared for the arrival of Varroa and much more. Come and say hello.

John van Weeghel, President

Letter From The VAA Board

Dear Beekeeping Community of Victoria,

As we face the recent news of Varroa Mite being discovered in two locations in the northwest of the state, and the unfortunate spreading of this invasive pest through legal movements of hives, we want to express our solidarity and unwavering support for each one of you.

We understand that this news has caused concern, fear, and frustration. The presence of Varroa Mite in Victoria is a critical moment for all of us, but we must remember that this situation is a matter of time, not a matter of blame. These pests are an inevitability that has affected beekeepers across New South Wales, and they are now a challenge that we must face together. The nature of beekeeping means that pests like Varroa Mite can spread quickly, and despite our best efforts, they will inevitably reach areas previously unaffected.

While the spread of Varroa Mite is concerning, it is important to know that there are strategies in place to manage this situation. The Transition to Management (T2M) plan, which has been rolled out in response to the incursion in New South Wales, now extends to Victoria. The T2M plan recognises that eradication is no longer feasible and focuses on practical, collaborative measures to help beekeepers manage the pest and ensure the long-term health of our industry. The key components of this plan include ongoing support, education, and surveillance, all designed to equip us with the tools and knowledge needed to protect our hives.

The beekeeping community has always shown remarkable resilience and unity in the face of challenges. There are resources available to guide you through monitoring and management practices, and new opportunities for collaboration with experts and fellow beekeepers. The plan also emphasises the importance of surveillance and reporting, ensuring we all play a crucial role in tracking the pest's spread and implementing effective management strategies.

As always, it is vital that we approach this situation with a spirit of compassion, understanding, and unity. The beekeeping community is a tight-knit, passionate group that has always looked out for one another. News travels fast, and while fear and frustration may be natural reactions, it is vital that we support each other through this challenging time. No one is at fault for the spread of this pest. It is a situation that, unfortunately, we all knew might come eventually, and now it is upon us.

In times like these, we must remember our shared purpose — to protect our bees and the critical role they play in pollination and the health of our environment. Together, with the support of the T2M plan, we can take the necessary steps to manage the situation, support one another, and continue to advocate for the well-being of our hives, our honey, and our shared future. We encourage you to follow biosecurity measures and share knowledge with your fellow beekeepers.

Regards VAA Board

NATIONAL
Varroa Mite Management
PROGRAM

Wellbee-ing Newsletter

February 2025

Your hives need your health

The incursion of Varroa mite in Australia has come with many challenges, not only faced with new ways of beekeeping it can also affect us emotionally, physically and mentally, all normal responses to change.

During times of change, it's common to face situations beyond our control. It's completely natural to feel worried, anxious, or even angry when things get difficult. However, it's crucial to prioritise your mental health and well-being and to reach out for help if needed. Maintaining good mental health is key to building resilience and for those impacted more intensely, aiding in your recovery.

Having engaged with thousands of beekeepers since the first detection of Varroa, our observations are that it is likely many beekeepers have or are experiencing varying levels of apprehension or concern.

Across the nation people will be at different stages of their Varroa journey, and each stage brings a fresh set of challenges. For example:

1. Pre-Varroa arrival

Beekeepers are aware of the potential consequences of Varroa. They may have participated in workshops, webinars, and talks from VDOs, or agency apiary staff, but still feel unsure about handling Varroa once it reaches their apiary. This uncertainty is not due to a lack of understanding of the workshop material, chemical usage, or Varroa testing techniques, but rather stems from the emotional toll of anticipating its arrival.

2. Managing Varroa

Beekeepers are now actively dealing with Varroa mite in their hives, learning how to manage this new and evolving situation. These beekeepers may also have participated in workshops, webinars, and talks from VDOs or agency apiary staff and are now putting into practice what they have learnt, some confidently, some unsure, feeling overwhelmed by the decisions they need to make to manage Varroa and some also, as with the group above, feeling they are unable to cope with this new situation.

3. (In NSW) Post-Varroa eradication

Beekeepers have had experiences linked to the emergency response phase. It could involve the emotional impact of the loss of control of managing their hives during the response, the frequent changes to requirements on beekeepers during this time through to the trauma of having hives euthanised during the response to Varroa.

Remember, if you're not well within yourself, you risk losing the motivation to manage your hives (amongst other things), so for your bee's sake, take care of yourself!

Resilience is here to support beekeepers and to help you navigate this new situation

Resilience Support

Resilience Officer, Jamie, is here to support you; all conversations are strictly confidential. Jamie is Mental Health First Aid accredited and trained to support you with all levels of support.

Contact Jamie on 0477 544 379
jamie.perry-meijer@dpi.nsw.gov.au or
www.varroa.org.au/resilience.

Wellbeing Services

There are many organisations and services you can reach out to for wellbeing resources, guidance and support. Many of these offer free counselling and support services and can be accessed online or via phone.

Some helpful places to start to find out more about the support available include:

Head to Health (www.headtohealth.gov.au)
An Australian Government website that offers multiple ways of searching for digital mental health resources.

Lifeline Phone: 13 11 14
Anyone across Australia experiencing a personal crisis can contact Lifeline's confidential crisis support service. Trained volunteers are available 24/7 to listen and provide support and referrals.

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Wellbee-ing Newsletter, cont'd

(Continued from page 8)

Mental Health Line Phone: 1800 011 511
The Mental Health Line is a 24/7 service operating across NSW which is staffed by mental health clinicians. Anyone, including carers or family members, can call the line to be directed to the most appropriate care. The mental health professionals operating the line will assess the urgency of the call and make recommendations for follow-up treatment.
Women's Information & Referral Service Phone: 1300 888 529
A free and confidential telephone service for women in NSW. The WIRS can help you find information that you, your family or friends may need including information on many organisations and services available to women. The service operates Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm.
Mensline Phone: 1300 789 978
Mensline Australia is a 24/7 telephone and online support, information and referral service for men with family and relationship concerns. The service is staffed by professional counsellors, experienced in men's issues.

Do you know of a fellow beekeeper who may be doing it tough but isn't on our email listing? Encourage them to sign up at National Varroa Mite Management Program e-news or phone the *Exotic Plant Pest Hotline* on 1800 084 881 to receive the latest in Varroa *Resilience* developments.
For more information from the *National Varroa Mite Management Program* visit varroa.org.au.

Is there a conversation you've been putting off?

While time can change a lot, sometimes just a few minutes of honest talk can make a huge difference.

Let's have that conversation.

Visit www.varroa.org.au/resilience

VAA Press Release, Wed. 12th Feb. 2025

Bushfires add to Beekeepers' Burdens

Bushfires in the Grampians and Little Desert National Parks have decimated critical bee forage areas, further burdening Victoria's stressed apiculture industry.

Significant threats are impacting the livelihoods of Victorian beekeepers and the food security of the entire state.

At the same time, Government support is dropping, with the shock shutdown of an important Public Lands Engagement Group, angering beekeepers.

150 Public Land bee sites have been lost to the Grampians and Little Desert fires, with bee flora recovery in these areas expected to take many years.

Devastating bushfires in the Grampians destroyed apiary sites placed there to forage on native trees and shrubs. Photo courtesy of Andrew Harvey.

Over 1000 bee hives were directly lost in the fires. Beekeepers in these areas will struggle to recover.

Significant losses of both honey production and future pollination contracts will affect their business viability.

Beekeepers were already dealing with a difficult season.

Drought conditions have affected native flora flowering, resulting in a lack of nectar and subsequent honey production.

The loss of important bee forage areas also makes it more difficult for beekeepers to maintain healthy hives.

This puts future pollination contracts at risk, putting further pressure on beekeepers' businesses.

On top of this, is the looming threat of Varroa mite.

When Varroa establishes itself in Victoria, it will have catastrophic consequences on honey production and pollination services across the state.

Beekeepers are on high alert, but many are concerned about the preparedness of the sector to respond to the inevitable outbreak and spread.

The Victorian Apiarists Association is calling on the state government to better support beekeepers at this difficult time.

Direct engagement is required to address the immediate challenges posed by bushfires, resource limitations and policy restrictions.

An immediate reinstatement and commitment to the Apiculture on Public Lands Engagement Group (APLEG) is required to facilitate communication between beekeepers and on ground land managers, right through to policy managers.

New site applications are languishing with Government departments for over 18 months.

Support is required to fast track these applications, especially for beekeepers in bushfire affected areas.

The Victorian beekeeping industry is at a critical juncture.

If immediate action is not taken, the consequences will be far reaching, not only for beekeepers, but for the broader agricultural sector, that relies on pollination services.

The VAA calls on the Government and all stakeholders to support our beekeepers in their time of need, to ensure the continued viability of not only our beekeepers but also our food security.

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AHBIC Information Update: DWV

Industry Information Deformed Wing Virus
Article by Dr Emily Remnant,
BEE lab, University of Sydney
14th February 2025

Deformed wing virus has been found in Australia. Should we be worried?

Deformed wing virus (DWV) is a common virus found in honey bee populations across the globe. Despite extensive surveys of honey bee viruses in Australia (1), DWV had not been detected in Australian bees until February 2025, when it was found during re-testing of invasive red dwarf honey bees (Apis florea) which were collected from the Burrup Peninsula in northern WA in 2023. Why was DWV not found earlier? What does this mean for our beekeeping industry, and should we be concerned?

How do we detect exotic viruses?

Virus testing involves combining and crushing a sample of honey bees (for example, 50 workers) from a colony and taking a subsample of this 'bee smoothie' to extract the genetic material. The virus detection step usually involves a technique called PCR, a targeted method that uses specific 'primers' that have been designed to match and amplify a section of the virus genome. This method works when we know the genetic sequence of the virus, however identifying any new viruses requires more in-depth genetic testing.

Some may be wondering why DWV was not detected when red dwarf honey bee colonies were first examined in 2023. There are a few reasons why a virus may not be found during routine surveillance and testing, some of the main ones:

Strength in numbers

Finding an exotic virus at low numbers in a population of bees can be similar to finding a needle in a haystack. Not every bee in a colony will carry the same level of viruses, and unless you test every single bee (which is cost prohibitive), there is a chance a virus may be missed. In addition, some virus levels might be extremely low within an infected bee, making them difficult to detect. Surveillance is a numbers game, it relies on multiple samples across a landscape to ensure an acceptable level of confidence can be achieved. Surveillance should be viewed as an ongoing process rather than a one-off 'yes or no' answer. Any conclusions should be revisited regularly with further sampling - the more you look, the more chance you have of finding things.

It was a case of repeated surveillance showing a positive result in the invasive Apis florea. DWV was only detected in one of the 40 colonies tested and it was present at very low levels, and only in the second sample taken from that colony. We can assume that very few workers in that colony were infected, and original testing on the first sample taken from that colony did not include DWV-infected bees, but additional samples from the same colony did.

Viruses mutate quickly!

Each year we need to get a new flu vaccine, which has been designed to specifically protect us against new

(Continued on page 12)

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AHBIC Information Update: DWV, cont'd

(Continued from page 11)

identified strains that develop. DWV, like influenza, has multiple different strains. The genome of DWV contains 10,000 'letters', called bases. Over time, some bases mutate to generate new versions of the virus which eventually become distinct strains from the original version. The two main DWV strains globally are DWV Strain A (DWV-A) and DWV Strain B (DWV-B), whose genomes contain around 15% of differences in their sequence. Other less common strains also exist (e.g. DWV-C, -D and potentially more).

A targeted PCR method (as described earlier) uses a pair of virus-specific primers, each around 20 bases in length, that can only detect viruses that share this identical sequence. If there is a virus strain that contains a mutation in the part of the genome where the primers should match, they will no longer match, and the test may come up negative. Most of our honey bee virus diagnostic assays are designed so that they target a region of the genome that is common between different strains, or a different test is designed for each of the currently known strains. The tests used for DWV detect both major strains with high sensitivity, so it is not the case that the original testing failed to detect DWV when it should have.

What is in our favour?

The DWV detection has been found in a remote area in northern WA, and it has been 2 years since the colony that had DWV was destroyed with no further detections. A quarantine zone around Dampier has been in place since March 2023 and no movement of bees or equipment has occurred since that time. The local environment is harsh and not conducive to rapid honey bee reproduction and the eradication program has continued to destroy any bee colonies as they are found. No managed colonies exist in the quarantine area and few unmanaged European honey bee colonies have been identified, however ongoing surveillance must assess whether any co-localised European honey bees are at risk of coming into contact with any remaining red dwarf bees in this region, as DWV can be transmitted by bee-to-bee contact when foraging on resources or robbing.

Importantly, DWV has been confirmed in only one red dwarf honey bee colony, and all of the 40 other colonies have tested negative for DWV after two rounds of testing. This is encouraging, but virus testing of any additional red dwarf honey bee colonies, and any European Honey Bees found in the area is needed before we know whether DWV has established in the invasive population or not.

What happens now?

On its own, DWV rarely causes disease symptoms in bees. When combined with varroa, DWV is spread rapidly and virus infections in bees are much more deadly. The red dwarf honey bee detection in northern WA has its own mite called Euvarroa, but it is not known to spread DWV in the same way, nor is it known that the Euvarroa mites carried by our invasive Apis florea will be able to parasitise our managed honey bees (2).

Now that DWV has been detected in the West, and with varroa establishing in the East, if the virus and mite meet, it will create an association where mites can now spread and amplify the DWV infection in our managed hives.

Adhering to movement restrictions in the red dwarf honey bee quarantine zone is critical.

All efforts to avoid uniting DWV with European honey bees, and especially bees with Varroa destructor, should be a priority. We know from overseas that once DWV emerges in a varroa-affected bee population, mite management becomes even more challenging.

Dr Emily Remnant, BEE lab, University of Sydney;

With thanks to Danny Le Feuvre, Dr Cooper Schouten, Dr Nadine Chapman and Dr John Roberts for contributions, discussion and feedback.

References

1. Roberts, J. M. K., D. L. Anderson and P. A. Durr (2017). "Absence of deformed wing virus and Varroa destructor in Australia provides unique perspectives on honeybee viral landscapes and colony losses." Scientific Reports 7(1): 6925.

2. Ramsey, S. D. (2021). "Foreign Pests as Potential Threats to North American Apiculture: Tropilaelaps mercedesae, Euvarroa spp, Vespa mandarinia, and Vespa velutina." Veterinary Clinics: Food Animal Practice 37(3): 545-558.

ANOTHER SLOVENIAN BEEKEEPING TOUR IN MAY

By John Kennedy

Every year since 2014, US citizen (with Slovenian origins) Suzanne Brouillette has offered comprehensive beekeeping tours of Slovenia.

This year another small special interest tour is on offer over May 7-20, and again the itinerary is comprehensive.

Slovenia has a long cultural and community history in beekeeping where the AZ hive system is comprehensively practiced.

The itinerary (available from beeslovenia@gmail.com) includes numerous visits to local beekeepers, a visit to a museum of beekeeping and a session with a local apitherapy practitioner.

Other agricultural visits include to local cheese, pumpkin oil and olive oil producers.

I know one Victorian beekeeper who has joined one of these tours previously and speaks strongly about the value of the experience.

The tour cost is $US4400, with extensive home or farm hosting included, and comprehensive historical exposure, as well as to the local lived experience.

Flight costs to join the tour in Ljubljana Airport are additional.

VAA 2025 Recreational Conference Speaker Biographies

We are delighted to have assembled a galaxy of talent for the program, offering insights for everyone, from the newest starting beekeeper to old hands. As well as several of our familiar VAA faces, here are the profiles of our guest presenters. As highlighted in the conference theme, we cover Basics to Biosecurity; don't miss this essential opportunity to upskill.

Dr Emily Remnant is a Senior Lecturer in the BEE lab at the University of Sydney. Her research program aims to understand and prevent the negative impacts of emerging viruses and parasitic mites on honey bees, and to define the role of Varroa as a viral vector. She is currently investigating how the viral landscape of Australian bees is changing due to Varroa's spread, and investigating the impact of two novel Rhabdoviruses on honey bee health.

Olivia Ducommun-Dit-Verron is a PhD candidate in the Agricultural Bio-Solutions Laboratory at La Trobe University, working with Professor Travis Beddoe. Her research is all about exploring innovative vaccine strategies and understanding how immune protection can be passed down through generations in western honey bees, particularly focused on tackling American and European Foulbrood infections. Before diving into her PhD, she completed a Master's degree using therapeutic bacteriophages to control American Foulbrood infections. She is passionate about blending science with practical solutions to protect these essential pollinators and support sustainable agriculture.

Liz Frost works as 'Technical Specialist - Bees' for the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. Liz started with bees in 2008 at the University of California, Davis, as Sue Cobey's student volunteer, working her way up to lab and field technician. Before coming to Australia in 2013, Liz worked as a US Bee Informed Partnership technician with commercial queen breeders and honey producers. She started E. Frost Apicultural Services in 2013, contracting AI and queen breeding services internationally. Liz is also currently a Master's candidate at the University of New England Animal Genetics and Breeding Unit.

Mike Allerton has been an avid recreational beekeeper for the last 10 years after several decades out of the game. Not satisfied with short courses, YouTube, books and field days to improve his knowledge, Mike gained his Certificate III Beekeeping with Tocal Agricultural College and is a certified University of Florida Master Beekeeper. He continues his University of Florida studies at the Master Craftsman level. Mike represents hobby beekeepers through Amateur Beekeepers Australia to state and federal governments to improve awareness and conditions of bees and beekeeping. One of his favourite activities is to talk to people about bees at schools, garden clubs and community events.

Dr Liz Barbour is presently the CEO of the Cooperative Research Centre for Honey Bee Products (ww.crchoneybeeproducts.com), a federally and industry funded research program with the aim of adding value to

(Continued on page 14)

(Continued from page 13)

the honey bee product industry. She has worked in industry, State Government and within the University system and in Australia has been awarded RIRDC, NHT, ARC Linkage and ACIAR funding as well as undertaken consultancies.

Jessica Locarnini is Australia's first certified Honey Sommelier to become a member of the prestigious Italian Honey Registry of Sensory Experts. With her expertise as a honey judge and senior marketing professional, Jess brings a fresh perspective to the art of honey appreciation. In this session, she'll share tips to help your honey brand stand out.
Since founding Honey Merchant in 2018, Jess has worked with beekeepers, industry bodies, and food leaders to showcase Australia's diverse honey landscape. She regularly hosts masterclasses and tastings, and has featured at the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival and the Asian Apiculture Awards. Jess is also a contributor to Australasian Beekeeper Magazine and judges for the Royal Tasmanian Fine Food Awards, Red Hill Mead Show, and Sydney Royal National Honey Show.

Register now:
VAA Recreational Conference,
29 Mar 2025,
Hume Global Learning Centre – Sunbury,
www.vicbeekeepers.com.au/events

Bendigo Branch Report

Welcome to Autumn, now officially started and recognised by many deciduous trees in the Northern Country, with many leaves already displaying a colour change. Grey Box is flowering in greater numbers by the day with bees observed showing interest. Whether much nectar is available beyond a couple of hours is difficult to say as flowering had been fairly sporadic in mid to late February. In regional centres bees have increased nectar gathering which is variable depending on introduced street plantings.

In February Lindsay Callaway, VAA Vice President and Owner-Operator of Warral Maldon, presented numerous practical methods to feed bees, a fantastic overview and extremely well timed for many recreational apiarists in areas experiencing a dearth. Congratulations to Lindsay Callaway voted the Bendigo Branch's VAA representative for 2025.

For Bendigo's March meeting, Michael St Clair is guest speaker, presenting on The Apiary Code of Practice. On the first Wednesday of the month Bendigo meetings are held at the Quality Lakeside Hotel commencing at 7pm. The Bendigo Branch Annual General Meeting will be held on April the 2nd.

Bendigo Calendar of Events

On Saturday the 29th of March many Bendigo members will attend the VAA Recreational Beekeeping Conference in Sunbury, followed by a site on Sunday 30th March at the Bendigo Sustainability Festival at the Garden for the Future, White Hills.

Flora Identification drive

On Sunday 23rd of February, Max and Jeff Maunder led a dozen beekeepers on a Flora Identification drive.

Meeting at Myers Flat, Jeff and Max led the way through the Southern part of the Whipstick, with regular stops pointing out the prolific eucalypt species of the Box-Ironbark forest, the soil, soil depth, and various elevations where different species dominate.

As we entered the Whipstick, Red Ironbark

(Continued on page 16)

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VAA Bendigo Branch Report, cont'd

(Continued from page 15)

(Eucalyptus tricarpa) was the abundant tree growing in the poor gravelly soil, generally on the higher ground (below).

Known for its thick iron filing looking hard dark bark, with deep vertical furrows. Often a reddy brown tinge can be seen between the furrows, where there has been physical or insect damage it has bright red brittle sap. Ironbark's generally have a pretty straight trunk, the buds flower a cream colour.

Photo 3

Progressing down a slope there was a splattering of Yellow Gum (Eucalyptus leucoxylon) in amongst the Ironbark, growing tall and fairly straight. (photo 3).

After shedding chunks of bark their yellow smooth trunk really stands out (below).

Yellow gums tend to have a reoccurring Y shape as the trunk continues growing fairly straight upwards.

Jeff and Max identified a location that grew a mixture of Ironbark, Red Box (Eucalyptus polyanthemus), Green Mallee (Eucalyptus viridis) and Grey Box (Eucalyptus macrocarpa).

Continuing we passed through higher elevations again, which were dominated by Mallees that are much shorter than the Ironbarks, Boxes and Gums.

Heading towards North Huntly we stopped where we could experience the difference in Green Mallee, Blue Mallee (Eucalyptus polybractea), Bull Mallee (Eucalyptus behriana) distinguished by its broader oval shaped dark green leaves; and Kamarooka Mallee (Eucalyptus froggattii) with its darker trunks and squarish buds and fruit.

The Green Mallee and Blue Mallee have very narrow leaves for eucalypts, even compared to Yellow Box, and the leaf colour is quite starkly different between the blue and green especially on the regrowth.

The Mallees in the Whipstick are stunted multi trunked trees growing from a lignotuber, a type of large mostly underground root ball. Mallees specialise growing in drier country on gravelly clay and stony soil

(Continued on page 17)

VAA Bendigo Branch Report, cont'd

(Continued from page 16)

(photo left, Kamarooka Mallee in foreground, flowering).

The drive was a great learning experience to identify the characteristics of the topography and geography that forms the basis of landscape features of the Box-Ironbark forests.

Jamie Trimby

ABC News – Science

How honey bees fight back against deadly varroa mites — with a little help

The *Varroa destructor* mite may be tiny — only a millimetre or two long — but it poses a massive threat to honey bees, beekeepers and honey producers, and agricultural sectors that largely rely on bees to pollinate crops worldwide…

Naturally resistant honey bees tend to be more aggressive and produce less honey, which is not ideal for honey production, especially in urban areas.

So bee breeders are trying to create colonies with some of these defences against varroa while retaining their positive qualities.

Read the full article here

A.I. Versus The Humble Honey Bee

By John Kennedy

AI or Artificial Intelligence is one of those things that is impossible to avoid these days.

Its relevance to beekeeping is discussed over two and a half pages of the latest Thorne's Newsletter, circulated by probably the UK's largest bee goods retailer.

They ask will it be the United States or China to dominate in this emerging technology? They add "AI promises a great deal; some hope it will help us to live better more fulfilled lives that provide greater opportunity for free time.

"Some see that AI can replace doctors and solicitors, or even run companies and countries better than people.

"However before we get too carried away, let's test it against something that should be a lot **more** complex than human know-how and organisations.

"Let's test it against something that should be a lot **less** complex than human know-how and organisations.

"Let's test AI's capability in a complex real life situation.

"Let's test it against the humble honey bee!".

What has thus emerged is what they call The Thorne Challenge or put simply - Can AI or an improved version of Deep Blue (the original chess playing expert system of developing a machine that could beat a chess master) emulate the decision making and behaviour of the humble honeybee to ensure the survival of the colony, generation after generation.

"In other words, can AI create a virtual colony that ebbs and flows during different seasons, produces sufficient stores, survives and reproduces itself through swarming?

Thorne's say "emulating the behaviour of the humble honey bee at the individual level means that the developer of an AI system cannot use an algorithm that lies at the colony level for instance – when drones fall below 15% of the colony, produce more drone cells.

"The challenge is to have the collective sum of the individual bee activities add up to efficient honey production and the survival of the colony".

After discussing all the inherent differences of a bee colony Thorne's say "A colony of bees operates as a complex adaptive system.

"The Thorne Challenge is for an AI system to emulate this availability to adapt to different solutions in an effective way,

"It is going to be harder than it appears at first sight "an AI system that truly emulates bee behaviour looks like it has to have some sort of intentionality built in.

It has to provide opportunities for the 'virtual bees' to make individual choices or to put it another way, encompass free will".

Thorne's invite submissions to their office and notes bees (like all other creatures) make decisions enabling them to operate one step ahead of learnt behaviours and their evolutionary specified responses, and in anticipating the future they beat the world to the punch!

New Book Release: Feeding Honeybees

By John Kennedy

FEEDING HONEY BEES THROUGHOUT THE YEAR
A first edition paperback of 38 pages.
Published by Northern Bee Books
(www northernbeebooks.co.uk)
11 pounds 50 pence plus $A Conversion and Postage.
Authored by David MacFawn.

This book, quite specific to the subject title, is written by an experienced beekeeper who says honeybee feeding needs to be integrated into a yearly strategic plan, and a successful beekeeper needs to plan six months ahead.

"While sometimes a colony may need feeding immediately to keep it alive, a long term plan is crucial for colony management" MacFawn says.

"Beekeepers spend considerable time ensuring their colonies have adequate nutrition.'

"In fact, beekeepers often consider nutritional stress to be one of the most significant threats to honey bee health.

"Thus, it is imperative that every beekeeper is able to recognise nutritional stress associated with nectar and pollen deficiencies, and how to remedy these issues as they arrive."

MacFawn has developed a guide for this very purpose.

The book has 13 sections or chapters beginning with sugar syrup feeding equipment, pollen and pollen substitute feeders, water, seasonal approaches, feeding is local, issues with moisture, goals and methods for first-year colonies, goals and methods for established and production hives, an introduction to the feeding year, water; seasonal approaches, spring feeding, summer feeding, post-harvest and fall feeding.

There is also a useful reference guide for further reading.

As the publisher notes MacFawn has developed a guide and shares strategies, tips and tricks that beekeepers can use to ensure their colonies are well-nourished.

This work seems a useful addition to the bee literature covering an aspect that often gets little coverage in more expansive beekeeping texts.

The Australian Bee Journal welcomes letters and contributions from readers and members. Please send any letters, articles or photos to abjeditors@yahoo.com

NEAA AUTUMN PACKDOWN DAY

By John Kennedy

The North Eastern Apiarist's Association has scheduled an Autumn pack down day for Sunday 23 March.
The event will run from1-4 pm.
The venue is Butterworth Lane at Mudgegonga.
And it is a free event.

The NEAA say 'the end of the beekeeping season is fast approaching and seasonal conditions have been less than favourable.
'The intention is to

- Learn what steps you should be taking to ensure your hives make it through winter
- Make sure it is headed by a healthy queen,
- Make an assessment of pollen and honey stores for winter supplementary feeding when and how.
- Find and mark queens.
-

The event is free bur prior registration is required via Eventbrite or via secretary.neaa@gmail.com

The event is being held in a commercial apiary and like all NEAA events it will have a strong practical focus.

Beehive Sensors Offer Hope Saving Colonies

University of California – Riverside

A computer science team has developed a sensor-based technology that could revolutionize commercial beekeeping by reducing colony losses and lowering labor costs.

Called the Electronic Bee-Veterinarian, or EBV, the technology uses low-cost heat sensors and forecasting models to predict when hive temperatures may reach dangerous levels. The system provides remote beekeepers with early warnings, allowing them to take preventive action before their colonies collapse during extreme hot or cold weather or when the bees cannot regulate their hive temperature because of disease, pesticide exposure, food shortages, or other stressors.

"We convert the temperature to a factor that we are calling the health factor, which gives an estimate of how strong the bees are on a scale from zero to one," said Shamima Hossain, a Ph.D. student in computer science at UCR and lead author of a paper explaining the technology. This simplified metric, with a score of 'one' meaning the bees are at full strength, allows beekeepers unfamiliar with the underlying model to assess hive health quickly.

Boris Baer, a UCR professor of entomology, believes the technology could revolutionize beekeeping, which is essential to vast sectors of global agriculture. Honeybees pollinate more than 80 crops and contribute an estimated $29 billion annually to U.S. agriculture. Yet bee populations have declined due to various factors, including habitat loss, pesticide exposure, parasites, and climate change.

"Over the last year, the U.S. lost over 55% of its honeybee colonies," Baer said, citing data from Project Apis m., which monitors beehive losses throughout the U.S. "We are experiencing a major collapse of bee populations, and that is extremely worrying because about one-third of what we eat depends on bees."

Beekeepers now rely on their own judgment and manual inspections to detect problems, often leading to delayed interventions. With EBV, they can get real-time insights and predict conditions days in advance, significantly reducing labor costs, said Baer, who collaborated with Hossain and other scientists at UCR's Bourns College of Engineering.

"People have dreamed of these sensors for a very long time," Baer said. "What I like here is that this system is fully integrated into the hive setup that beekeepers already use."

Temperature fluctuations are among the first responses to any kind of threats to a hive's health. Honeybees maintain a precise internal hive temperature between 33 and 36 degrees Celsius (91.4–96.8°F), a requirement for proper brood development and colony survival, Baer said.

The EBV method is based on thermal diffusion equations and control theory, making its predictions interpretable to both scientists and beekeepers, Hossain said. The model uses temperature data collected from low-cost sensors installed inside the hive, feeding that information into an algorithm that predicts hive conditions several days in advance. In tests conducted at UCR's apiary, the EBV method analyzed data from 10 hives during initial development and later expanded to 25 hives. The technology has already proven its effectiveness, detecting conditions that required beekeeper intervention.

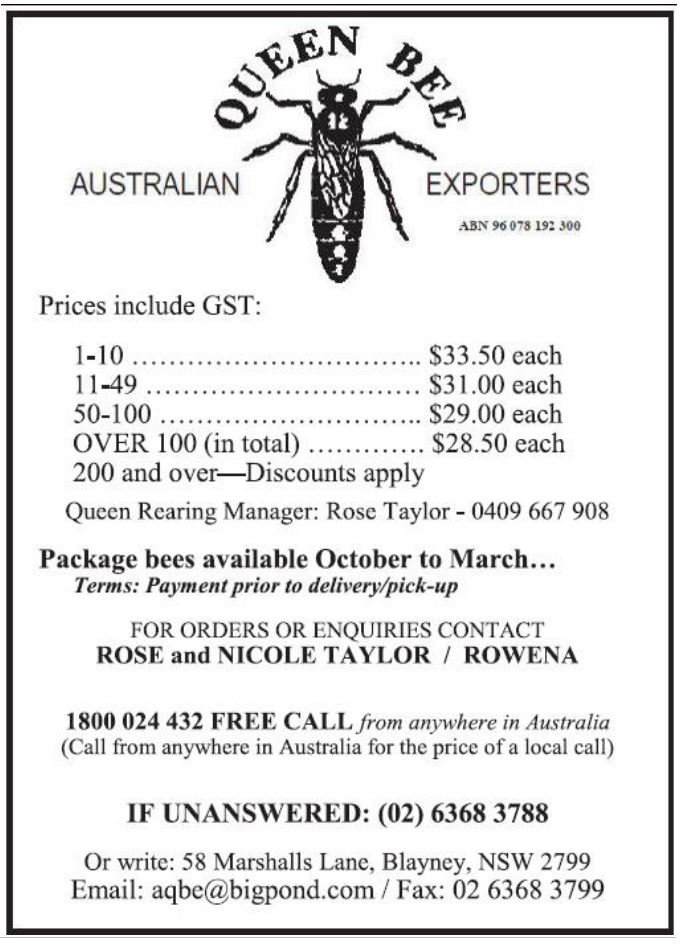
"When I looked at the dashboard and saw the health factor dropped below an empirical threshold, I contacted our apiary manager," Hossain recalled. "When we went to check the hive, we found that there was actually something wrong, and they were able to take action to manage the situation."

Hyoseung Kim, an associate professor of electrical and computer engineering at UCR, explained that keeping costs low, under $50 per hive, is a high priority. "There are commercial sensors available, but they are too expensive," Kim said. "We decided to create a very cheap device using off-the-shelf components so that beekeepers can afford it."

The research team is already working on the next phase, which is to develop automated hive climate controls that can be installed on hives and respond to EBV's predictions, adjusting hive temperatures automatically.

"Right now, we can only issue warnings," Hossain said. "But in the next phase, we are working on designing a system that can automatically heat or cool the hive when needed."

The title of Hossain's paper is "Principled Mining, Forecasting and Monitoring of Honeybee Time Series with EBV+" In addition to Hossain, Baer and Kim, the co-authors are Christos Faloutsos, Professor of computer science at Carnegie Mellon University, and Vassilis Tsotras, Professor of computer science and engineering at UCR. All the authors are with UCR's Center for Integrative Bee Research, one of the largest pollinator health research hubs in the nation.



VAA Melbourne Section Report, March 2025

Varroa is now in central Vic. Plants at the Feb meeting. VAA MS Rep to the VAA Board. Allergies explained at the March meeting. Recreational Conference … is there any other choice?

Do your varroa testing

The recreational beekeepers are more important than ever as we try to track varroa in Victoria. Varroa has been detected in central Victoria and this is only known because someone did their varroa tests. Each of us can contribute to managing varroa by regularly testing and reporting all results to BeeMAX.

The test requires that we deliberately kill some bees from each hive and this is not a good feeling. However, if we don't test regularly now, then we may find varroa is well established later and this is much worse for the bees. Remember that the workers always work and live for the whole hive, so this is part of their contribution to the hive.

February meeting

We welcomed Richard Rowe, who teaches the Plant Identification unit at Melbourne Polytechnic's Cert III in beekeeping, to speak about plants and bees at the February meeting. It was good to get a summary of the role of some different plants and the characteristics that different sections of the society pay attention to and the consequences of any narrow focus.

Honey tasting will continue to be a regular feature of the meetings. We will have a few people bring in some honey and we can all have a taste (we had pikelets, yum) to compare from different locations. Thanks to Chris for Bulleen honey, James for Rosebud (mostly melaleuca) honey and Ivan with honey from Coburg cemetery.

VAA MS Representative to the next VAA Board

John van Weeghel was elected unopposed as the VAA Melbourne Section's Appointed Representative to the VAA Board at the Melbourne Section election held on February 27th, the monthly meeting.

The VAA Melbourne Section thanks John for his contributions over many years to the VAA at Board level as well as to the Melbourne Section.

March meeting

The words allergic and anaphylactic and a few others are bandied around by us beekeepers, but even more by the general public. So will be a privilege to have Dr Kevin Nguyen who will provide us with a specialist version on what happens when we get stung.

There will be more honey tasting and stories and guesses as to what flora it is.

Beeginners' Corner will start looking at that final extraction and packing down for Winter.

Recreational Conference versus …. what?!

Another reminder, that the Recreational Conference is going to be a really good experience. Check out the details in the advertisement somewhere in this journal [pages 3, 13 & 31], or in the VAA Fortnightly Bulletin. (No bull, it's about bees.) Or on the events page on the VAA Website.

And in relation to this, let's do some maths! There are about 10,000 Victorian beekeepers with less than 10 hives. About 2,500 beekeepers have attended a National Varroa Management Workshop in Victoria. A couple of hundred are regulars at beekeeping group meetings. The conference can hold 200+ attendees. My question is: what are the rest of you doing to become better beekeepers to cope with varroa? And if it is really effective, don't keep it a secret.

Our bees are more than a personal, private hobby: it has a big impact on others. We have a wonderful effect on the flora and gardens around us, and we will be even more important when the wild honeybee hives die out. Keeping going will become a really important role for all of us, especially as we have the biggest mix of genetic material across the State.

If you don't get to the Recreational Conference, might you be (*not* mite you bee) missing out on a broad range of beekeeping presentations and up to date knowledge that you will not get from the internet? There is something about live people who can be questioned and are real in front of you. So see you there.

The End of Summer

Well, if summer has not already completed - based on the Dec to Feb model, then it will finish soon after this report is read based on the solstice / equinox model.

Remember to keep a jar of your honey for the various conference competitions and get that wax refining happening for the same reason.

Enjoy your bees.

Rob Kerr, VAA Melbourne Section Secretary
on behalf of the Melbourne Section.

AHBIC Update

Varroa Destructor Confirmed Lockyer Valley

Biosecurity Queensland has confirmed positive identification of varroa mite (Varroa destructor) for the first time in Queensland. Initial samples were provided from a recreational apiary in the Lockyer Valley and as of Tuesday 4th March additional samples from recreational and commercial apiaries in the area have been collected and are being sent to laboratories in order to confirm the presence of Varroa destructor.

Biosecurity Queensland has been working closely with affected beekeepers in the Lockyer Valley and beekeepers looking for support can reach out to Biosecurity Queensland's Varroa Development Officers (VDO). VDO's can provide free guidance and practical advice to all Queensland beekeepers to assist with early detection and integrated pest management. They can be contacted by emailing **varroa@daf.qld.gov.au**

QLD Beekeepers Urged to Conduct Surveillance

AHBIC reminds Queensland beekeepers to continue best practices in conducting their own surveillance for varroa in their colonies. We also note that Biosecurity Queensland has requested any beekeepers who have received bees, beehives or beekeeping equipment from the Lockyer Valley since December 2024, you are strongly encouraged to check your hives and report results to **Bee 123**.

The National Varroa Mite Management Program website **varroa.org.au** is a great resource for surveillance instructional videos along with the **Bee Pest Blitz**.

You can reach out to AHBIC via: **National Varroa Mite Coordinator** Bianca Giggins, Mob: 0402 467 780 **bianca@honeybee.org.au**

New Book Release: Dead Bees Don't Make Honey

By John Kennedy

DEAD BEES DON'T MAKE HONEY
Authored by Theresa J Martin,
published by Little Wolf Farm.
Available from Northern Bee Books
(www.northernbeebooks.co.uk)
paperback of 260 pages.
16 pounds 25 pence plus postage and $A conversion.

I really like books where there is certainty in the title and contents.

This latest first edition is subtitled "10 Tips for Healthy Productive Bees" and it comes from a period when US beekeepers are on average, losing nearly half their honey bee colonies each year.

The author in her introduction notes that "conventional beekeeping methods no longer adequately support the health of managed colonies in the age of deadly varroa destructor, pesticide exposure and diminishing natural forage.

"The bees themselves reveal the solution to this crisis.

"Recent science explains how wild bees survive, despite experiencing similar pressures and without human help".

Theresa Martin's response is to create a holistic approach that strengthens managed colonies and increases honey production

She has achieved 99% colony survival with 20-25 colonies producing a honey crop (in the USA) that is above the local average.

Using the Broodminer temperature sensing to detect hive problems she is able to act before the colony is lost.

Her methodology includes treatment free summarising the pathology, obstacles and opportunities on how to handle the threat of Varroa.

Her ten tips are – acquire local bees, encourage more propolis, space colonies further apart, do not overly disrupt the brood nest, keep colonies smaller, leave more than enough honey for winter, breed for survival only, insulate hives and practice Integrated Pest Management Systems.

These are all expressed in the first of four chapters.

The other three chapters are

- Investigate the Broodminder Temperature Systems,
- Treatment-Free Ways and
- The Bottom Deep.

This work seems valuable as it addresses issues that are foremost in the mind of thinking beekeepers.

It seems well worth the landed local cost.

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Honeybee Dance Styles Sway Foraging Success

Virginia Tech researchers in the Department of Entomology found that the secret to the bees' success in food gathering is all in the "waggle."

As far as animals go, honeybees are world-class dancers.

While not as deep and complex as a Super Bowl half -time show, the bees' moves, known as the "waggle" dance, convey very specific food foraging instructions to their nest mates. The direction the dancer moves explains to other bees which way to go, and the duration of the waggle dance, or the "run," shows how far to go. Once other bees have been convinced to follow the directions, they are "recruited." After receiving the instructions, these recruits leave the hive to find the food their sisters were so excited about.

Unfortunately, many of these recruited bees do not always successfully find the food they set out in search of. Margaret Couvillon, Associate Professor in the Department of Entomology in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, and her former Ph.D. student Laura McHenry wanted to find out why.

Trying to understand why waggle dances fail

Honeybees have had millions of years to perfect the waggle dance, so it may be surprising to learn that it doesn't often work. Even though it was first described by scientists over 80 years ago, there is still a lot about the waggle dance that we don't understand.

Couvillon has learned several interesting patterns related to this form of communication. One such observation was that bees have consistent, unique ways of dancing, meaning each bee has its own "style" that it adds to the communication. Could the success of the waggle dance be related to this uniqueness? Would bees that communicated similarly yield more successful recruits? Or is there some other factor at play? This study reveals the waggle to be a diverse form of communication that helps improve the likelihood that one bee can tell another where food can be found. The findings were recently published in *Current Biology*.

"Although the waggle dance itself is fascinating, my lab has additionally been intrigued about waggle dance miscommunication, or the hows and whys behind the failure of the dance recruitment," Couvillon said.

To answer these questions, the Couvillon Lab devised an experiment utilizing clear-walled hives, video cameras, and a method of tagging bees so they could be tracked as individuals when they foraged and danced. Each hive included foragers who had been taught the location of an artificial food source. These trained foragers performed a waggle dance to teach others where this food was, effectively training a new set of recruits. If successful in locating the food, these recruits returned to teach other bees what they learned. Couvillon and her team hypothesized that bees with similar dance styles would more often successfully teach others how to find the food, and communication that differed between bees would be less successful.

Whenever a new, tagged bee was observed at the food source, video of the hive was reviewed to determine which dancer had recruited that successful forager. This pattern of data collection allowed the researchers to track the dance the bees used, with each bee learning where the food was located from a slightly different telling. These successful dances were then compiled, and the run of each dance was measured and compared to the earlier dances. The pattern that emerged was not what the researchers expected.

The power of individuality

Based on the data from these dances, Couvillon and McHenry found that similar dance communication did not actually result in the most successful foraging, which was their original hypothesis. Dances that had a longer run, effectively telling the recruits to overshoot the food source, were more successful than dances describing similar, more accurate, distances. This pattern suggested that the "overshooting" instructions may have led to additional opportunities to find the food, once on the way past the food source and again on the way back to the hive. They theorized that the foragers having a second chance to find the food source increased the chance that they find it at all.

What does this mean for understanding the honeybee waggle dance? One takeaway is the importance of these unique communication styles, where individual dance mannerisms enhance communication success. If every bee communicated the same, the likelihood of foragers reaching the food would decrease as compared to having a diverse set of styles.

This study adds effective dance moves to the list of known benefits of individuality, showing that a diverse set of communication skills helps improve the likelihood that one bee can tell another where food can be found, all through dance.

"We've known for a while that behavioral and genetic diversity benefit honeybees, allowing for superior thermoregulation, disease resistance, growth, and foraging," said Couvillon. "Now we have also seen that diverse communication enhances recruitment success."

The paper, "*Individuality impacts communication success in honey bees*," was published in *Current Biology*. Couvillon's research was supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research, and the Department of Entomology at Virginia Tech.

Honey Yellow – The Bee in Art From the Renaissance to the Present

The bee is the popular figure of the 21st century. The major spring exhibition provides a comprehensive insight into the exciting history of the bee in art, from the Renaissance to the present day.
For the first time, this story is being told in an exhibition using top-class works of art. Never before has it been possible to experience the wide variety of roles played by the bee as vividly as in our exhibition. Surprising stories, instructive tales, philosophical ideas and astonishing allegories can be marveled at around this insect.
Read the article here

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AHBIC Newsletter, CEO Report, Feb 2025

It is so disheartening to hear all the stories from across the country of low honey production this season. Despite some pockets of NSW and QLD finding some honey the majority of the country is producing well below average yields. Rising cost of operating and low honey prices is making it tough for everyone.

Over the last month the team at AHBIC have been working across a few important industry matters; in the Varroa Transition to Management Program, had several meetings with Federal DAFF and the APVMA, and worked with some of our member bodies to assist in lobbying government at local levels.

Coloss Survey

The Coloss survey is now live, and it is important that ALL beekeepers participate whether you have varroa or not. The purpose of the survey is to gather hive health baseline information, importantly in the absence of varroa, to better map and understand the potential impacts.

Deformed Wing Virus – A: Detection

As we have communicated there has been a detection of DWV-A in an historical sample of Red Dwarf Honey Bees from WA. This detection has occurred when WA DPIRD retested some historical subsamples with a slightly varied assay that detected very low levels of virus. The refined positive sample was also tested by CSIRO using the national standard assay which also showed a positive result and very low levels.

Talking to many experts in this space we are comfortable that there is no reason to doubt the validity of the current assay. It is likely that the original colony had very low virus levels and sampling is why it tested negative in the first round of testing then positive on a new subsample of bees from the same colony.

Subcommittee Activities

The Levies Subcommittee has been active in meeting monthly to review the current levies and make some recommendations to improve the equity in the system. The committee will continue to meet monthly to work through the information to inform any recommendations.

The imported honey subcommittee has continued to source honey from the shelves to test. Active communications are ongoing with DAFF to progress a review of current testing protocols.

The congress organising committee also has been meeting monthly with the dates, venue and theme for the 2026 congress locked in. The committee has also started developing the program and a sponsorship prospectus will be available in the coming months.

Meetings/events

I attended the inaugural meeting for the steering committee of the National Pollination Strategy meeting in Melbourne. This full day strategy workshop started to map out the big 5-year project that is being lead by the Wheen Bee Foundation. This exciting project will be very important for our industry into the future.

I also attended Evoke Ag where I was able to connect with a number of exciting innovations and startups for the honeybee industry. This massive event attracted over 2,000 delegates from around the globe with thought provoking presentations and an exhibition hall bigger than any I have seen.

US colony losses

Reports out of the US of disturbing colony losses over their winter has attracted the attention of many in our industry. Whilst information is not clear as to the cause, the losses are huge. A survey of beekeepers coming out of winter has documented average losses of 62% across large commercial apiaries. Through conversations with US counterparts, it is thought that that almond pollination could be short nearly 350,000 colonies.

There is no pattern or correlation emerging yet, as the losses are broad across the US and not in a specific climatic or geographical region. We will be watching closely as this unfolds to understand if there are any learnings to be gained for us here in Australia.

The Month Ahead

The AHBIC board will be meeting face to face in Canberra on the 6th and 7th March. As part of this meeting, we will be holding a number of board member workshops to work through the final version of AHBIC strategic plan, workshop our preparedness for Tropilaelaps mites and review our AHBIC communications.

This week I will be attending Berry Quest 2025 to present on lessons learnt from the varroa response and network with berry growers from around the country.

Danny LeFeuvre
CEO

Biosecurity Protection Levy (BPL) has been scrapped

The 38 industry members of Australia's $39 billion plant industries represented by the Plant Industry Forum welcome news that the fundamentally flawed Biosecurity Protection Levy (BPL) has finally been scrapped.

Plant Industry Forum Committee Chair Nathan Hancock said the elimination of the Government's BPL from the Senate paves the way for Australia's next government to lead genuine consultation and create a sustainable biosecurity funding plan for the future. "The BPL attracted sustained and escalating opposition since it was announced almost two years ago, given producers weren't consulted openly and transparently from the start and the policy design was wrong," he said. … Mr Hancock said the plant industry has significant track record in biosecurity contributions, including in-kind support and investment worth around $33 million in cost sharing emergency responses in collaboration with all Australian governments over the past 10 years. "These investments have been directed to address issues... [including] Varroa mite," he said. "This figure is certain to increase as arrangements are finalised for cost sharing banana freckle and Varroa mite responses that are currently under way."

The Plant Industry Forum remained staunchly opposed to the BPL from its first announcement, condemning suggestions by the government that producers are the sole beneficiaries of a strong biosecurity system…

Extract from AHBIC February Newsletter

Successful Bee Insemination Using Frozen Semen

Until now, no bee insemination using frozen sperm had been reported in Belgium. This innovative method opens new avenues for biodiversity and agriculture.

Researchers from the University of Liège, as part of the FreezeBEE project, have achieved a promising breakthrough in bee insemination. For the first time, an attempt using frozen semen without the addition of antibiotics has resulted in the production of female brood, with a viability rate equivalent to traditional methods. This discovery paves the way for new opportunities in bee conservation and agriculture.

The conservation of bees is essential for ensuring crop pollination and maintaining biodiversity. With this in mind, a team of researchers from the University of Liège has developed an innovative protocol for the cryopreservation of drone semen, the male equivalent of bees. Their study presents a simplified, antibiotic-free method, creating new possibilities for apiculture and bee conservation.

"Bees play a crucial role in the ecosystem and agriculture," explains Sophie Egyptien, a doctoral researcher at ULiège and the lead author of the article. "Unfortunately, their populations are declining in many regions of the world. The conservation of their genetic material, such as drone semen, is a key strategy to preserve biodiversity and support breeding programmes." Cryopreservation is a research area with very few scientific teams working on it globally. It not only allows for the preservation of valuable genetic lines but also helps overcome restrictions related to the international transport of live animals.

A simple, antibiotic-free protocol

Since the 1980s, several freezing protocols have been developed, but with varying results. These protocols were often complex, involving multiple steps and the use of antibiotics to limit microbial contamination, and did not always produce reproducible outcomes. The ULiège team tackled this challenge with a more accessible approach: a simple dilution of the semen in a medium containing cryoprotectants. Cryoprotectants are substances used to protect cells, tissues, or organisms from damage caused by freezing and thawing. When an organism or cell is exposed to very low temperatures, ice crystal formation can damage cellular structures and lead to their destruction. Cryoprotectants, such as egg yolk, help mitigate these effects by reducing ice formation and maintaining cell integrity.

"Our method has demonstrated that, despite a 37% loss of sperm viability during freezing, five out of the eight queens inseminated with this frozen semen produced female brood," says Stefan Deleuze, Professor and Researcher at ULiège. "These results are comparable to those obtained with fresh semen in our study, which is very encouraging!"

This advancement offers several opportunities for apiculture. It enables the preservation of valuable genetic lines, allowing beekeepers to freeze the semen of disease-resistant or locally adapted strains. It also helps mitigate health risks by avoiding the transport of live bees, thereby reducing the spread of pathogens. Moreover, it supports breeding programmes by facilitating access to greater genetic diversity, even during reduced breeding periods, thereby strengthening the sustainability of colonies and preserving ecological balance.

A pioneering achievement in Belgium

This study is the first in Belgium to demonstrate that frozen semen can be used to produce female bees. To ensure a thorough analysis of their samples, the team benefited from the access to advanced microscopy facilities, which allowed for precise analysis of sperm quality.

"These results are promising, but we know that improvements are needed. We will now focus on optimising cryoprotectant concentrations and reducing viability losses," explains Stefan Deleuze. "We also need to assess the long-term impact on queen survival and female brood production."

This simple, antibiotic-free protocol marks a significant step towards bee preservation and global food security. With continued efforts, this technology could transform apicultural practices and help protect a vital pollinator within our ecosystem.

The deadline for the April Bee Journal is 10pm on Tuesday 1st of April

US Bee Bits

By John Kennedy

ALARMING HIVE LOSSES IN THE USA

US beekeepers, pollination contractors and the almond industry are reporting significant hive losses in the USA as beehives come out of winter in readiness for the almond pollination season.

The value has been calculated as in the order of $US140 million in hive losses.

The cause is unexplained, but the event is judged the worst experience since Colony Collapse Disorder was first identified in the mid-2000s.

Some causes are thought to be increased incidence of pesticides, a high level of parasite mites and a potential resistance developing to mite treatments including Amitraz, and genetic screening is also being undertaken for metallogenic analyses of microbial communities.

A broad range of official organisations including the USDA ARS Beltsville Maryland Bee Research Laboratory, various Universities and beekeeper organisations including the American Beekeeping Federation and others, are all charged to collect information and help with determining the causes.

The Beltsville laboratory for instance is collecting samples from hives and dead bees to determine known virus levels, pesticide residues in bees, wax and pollen and parasitic mite genes. In addition, field data, weather patterns and chemical risk factors are also involved.

One pollination contractor has commented that for his almond orders he always over allows 10% because of the number of hives that fail to test to the industry standard required.

This year he said his initial order was to over-supply 40% because of the poor condition or size of the hives coming forward from beekeepers for almond pollination.

"But my experience on the ground is that I must over supply 40 to 70% of my hive orders to ensure that enough meet the industry standard."

The organisations surveying the industry problem say they will share their information as quickly as possible including through social media and updates to beekeepers involved directly, together with a free public webinar in early March.

Findings that may directly impact beekeeping management, such as Amitraz resistance and clear pathogen signals, will be shard broadly.

CALIFORNIA BEEKEEPERS ACT ON THEFT

Theft and vandalism are an ever present risk for beekeepers regardless of where you site your hives.

In consequence many local beekeepers prefer to keep their hives, with the farmer or owner's permission, on private land.

In California the local State Beekeepers Association has announced new efforts for what it describes as 'the rapidly expanding number of hive theft incidents that continue to jeopardize agricultural production and increase food costs."

Since 2013 the state has seen an 87% increase in hive theft, estimated at a loss of $3.5 million according to the organization, representing commercial beekeepers who are in the main, suppliers of the massive pollination needs of almonds in particular.

Millions of hives (estimated at over three million) are brought in for the generally month long almond pollination session at payment of nominally $US225 per hive.

Now the almond industry is expecting that not enough hives will be available for the imminent current pollination season,

The Californian State Beekeepers Association is now working with the local Pipkin Private Detective Agency which specialises in agricultural crime to introduce a new commercial hive theft program available exclusively to its members.

Members are required to properly mark their hives with names and distinctive brands, and to use tracking devices such as air tags. They should also report hive thefts to local law enforcement.

"Every step you take to protect your hives will decrease the chance of theft or, at least increase the likelihood of criminal conviction if stolen " the association says

There is also a planned increase in No Trespassing signage and other deterrence documentation available to members at no charge.

US QUEEN SEASON UNDERWAY

Beekeepers in the USA are requeening as their hives are moving into better seasonal conditions post the winter season.

In consequence a large number of queen breeders are offering queens for sale with online posts.

The Stevens Bee Company (www.stevenbeeco,com) based in Missouri is one such vendor, offering Missouri Mite VSH Virgin Queens for sale.

They offer delivery within 48 hours of ordering but require recipients to be able to install their new queens within two days.

Their offer is for what they describe as "as daughters of our top instrumentally inseminated breeder queens that have proven themselves to be productive and thrive in an untreated apiary and have top scores on Harbo's VSH assay (zero % mite reproduction)".

Stevens offers further information together with numerous short video presentations on their queen rearing and production on their website.

At a point where local beekeepers seem likely to have to contend with the depredations of the varroa mite, it seems important that we are all familiar with developments in VSH (Varroa Sensitive Hygiene) queens and their production elsewhere,

Photo: Jamie Trimby
Jarrahdale Pumpkin
(Cucurbita maxima)

Churchill Fellowships applications 2025

People in the agriculture, horticulture and food production sectors are invited to consider applying for prestigious Churchill Fellowships.
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2025 is the 60th year of the Trust.
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From the AHBIC February Newsletter

Photo Lyn Talbot: bees in my garden

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Lindsay Callaway
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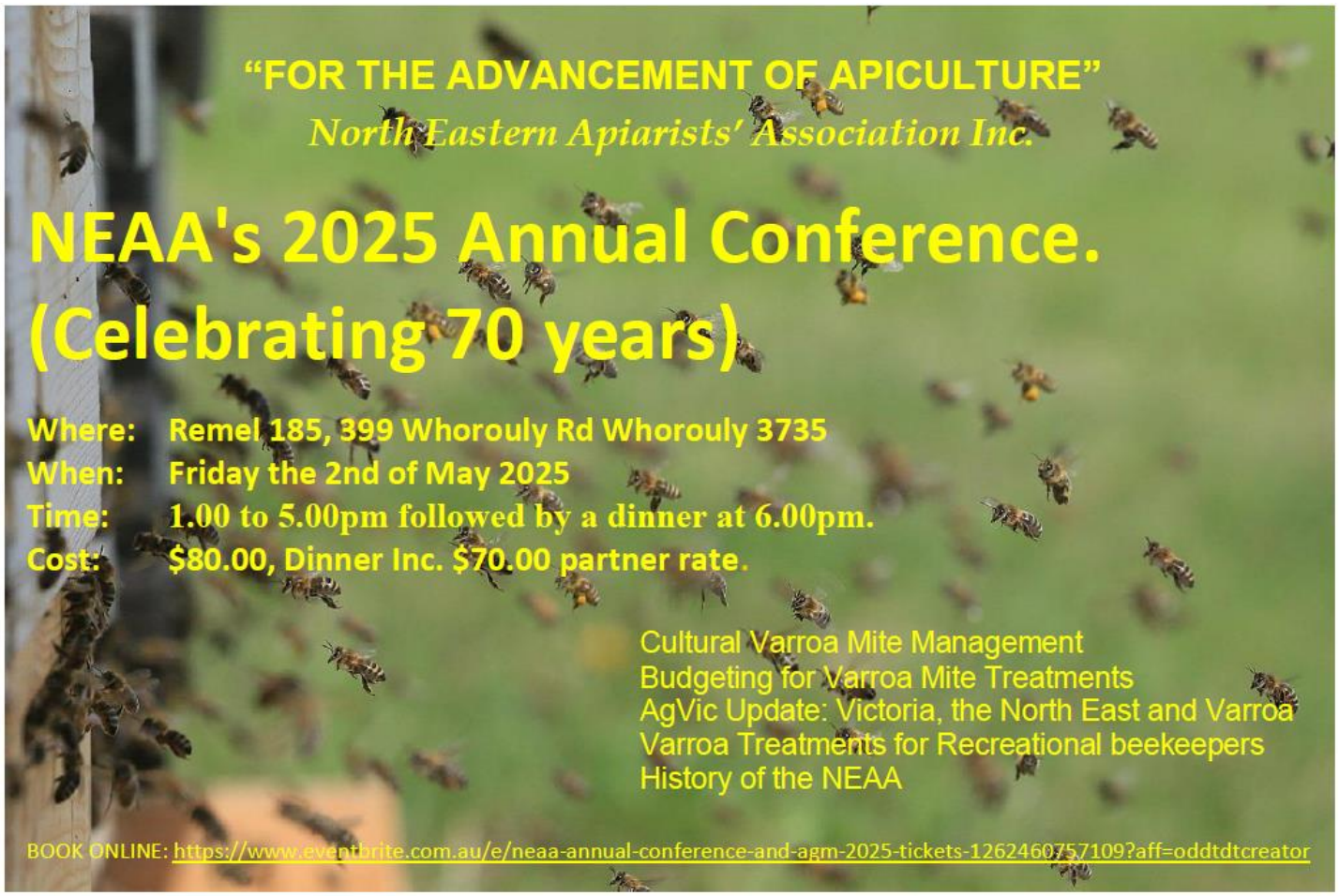
Upcoming Events

VAA Recreational Conference
Sat 29th March 2025
https://vicbeekeepers.com.au/event-5936461



VAA Annual Conference & AGM
SAVE THE DATE

Wednesday 11th June - Friday 13th June 2025
Grand Oaks Resort, Beechworth, Victoria

THE GRAND OAKS RESORT

VAA Recreational Conference

The VAA's Recreational and Education Subcommittees are excited to invite recreational beekeepers to our second annual conference to be held on Saturday 29th March in Sunbury. The venue for the event is the Hume Global Learning Centre. The conference is building on the success of our 2024 event where 93% of participants indicated that the conference last year met or exceeded their expectations and was good value for money. Our 2024 conference feedback also indicated that participants appreciated a mix of topics that appealed to both novice beekeepers and beekeepers with more experience.

There are three themes to this year's conference: Beekeeping Basics, Biosecurity and Honey Quality.

Beekeeping Basics

Within this theme, we have speakers on a range of topics including reliable requeening, winter pack down strategies, how to generate income from your beekeeping hobby as well as how to ensure you are compliant with food safety regulations if you decide to start selling your honey. We'll also present an innovative technology that will allow beekeepers to make speech-to-text notes during their hive inspections.

Biosecurity

No beekeeping conference would be complete, these days, without a session on varroa. We'll be looking at the current state of the incursion in Australia as well as presenting an innovative heat-treatment device for dealing with varroa infestations. Thankfully, varroa has not become endemic across the state this season so we are including other fascinating biosecurity topics including an overview of the viruses that affect honey bees and some current research on American Foul Brood.

Honey Quality

Australian beekeepers produce some of the world's most unique honey due to our reliance on massive eucalypt and other native tree flowering. We've invited a globally recognised leader in honey testing and classification to speak on the chemistry of honey. We have Australia's only honey sommelier speaking on how to elevate your honey brand and another speaker on strategies and techniques for winning entries in your next honey competition.

Trade Stalls & More!

In addition to this amazing program of speakers, we have some of our state's best beekeeping supply businesses attending with trade stalls so you can stock up on everything from frames to foundation and hives to honey-processing equipment. The event is catered with morning and afternoon tea and a delicious lunch. For those of you who want to make this a weekend of beekeeping expertise, the Transition to Management team is holding a full day varroa workshop at the same venue on Sunday, 30th March.

Enrol soon before spaces fill up. If you are a member of one of our many affiliate clubs around the state, check with your club's leadership team for special registration fees.

You can enrol at
https://vicbeekeepers.com.au/event-5936461

VAA Recreational Conference
Sat 29th March 2025

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Agriculture Victoria:
Agriculture Victoria: Apiary team
Website: Honey bees | Livestock and animals | Agriculture Victoria
Website:
www.agricultre.vic.gov.au/livestock-and-animals/honey-bees
To report a suspect exotic please call: Exotic Plant Pest Hotline 1800 084 881
For enquiries and endemic disease notification please use:
Ph: 136 186
Email honeybee.biosecurity @agriculture.vic.gov.au.
The Varroa project team can also be contacted at the above email.
For enquiries related to permits and movement restrictions:
Email honeybee.permits @agriculture.vic.gov.au

For beekeeper registration please log onto BeeMAX
www.bees.agriculture.vic.gov.au
or call the Bee Registration Helpline 1800 356 761

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If you can't reach an Officer and need to talk to someone urgently, please call the Customer Service Centre: Ph: 136 186

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Linda Laurie, Ph: 0408 419 759, E:
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(Note: Jess is on maternity leave until March 2025, but emails will automatically be forwarded to the Manager)

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Mob: 0408 592 091

Collingwood Childrens' Farm Apiary Open 10.30-3.30
2nd & 4th Sunday of month.
collingwoodbees@gmail.com
www.facebook.com/collingwoodbees

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bbvaasecretary@gnail.com
Chair: Jamie Trimby
bbvaachair@gmail.com
Treasurer: Carol Maunder
bbvaatreasurer@gmail.com
General Information Q&A Meetings - *1st Wed. each month (except Jan & Dec)*
Dinner at 6.00pm *(optional)*
Meeting at 7.00 pm.
Lakeside Hotel, Bendigo.
Executive Committee Meeting: 3rd Wed month as required.
Venue: As notified.
Please register to attend all Meetings

Melbourne Section:
Chair: A/Prof James Doery
Deputy Chairperson: Mike Love
Secretary, Rob Kerr
Ph: 0421 078 387
Treasurer: Janet Conos
vaamelbournesection@hotmail.com
www.vicbeekeepers.com.au/Melbourne-Section
Information/ Education Meetings: from 7:30 pm the last Thursday of each month except December
Location: Church of Christ,
1 The Avenue, Surry Hills.

Sunraysia Branch:
Naomi Forbes-Wilson
Ph: 0407 243 313
billabonghoney@yahoo.com

VAA Inc. Library Trust
Secretary: Russell Goodman,
Ph 03 9735 3836

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Secretary: Neil Barraclough:
neilbarra2@outlook.com
0429 888 706
Treasurer: Sean Paul Smith:
kaledprime@gmail.com
0466 041 199

North Eastern Apiarists' Association Inc. (NEAA Inc.):
Secretary: Moss McCallum
secretary.neaa@gmail.com

"J" Beekeepers Club Inc.
Meets on the second Wednesday of every month (Except January) at the Goonawarra Community Centre, 20 Dornoch Drive, Sunbury, VIC 3429

Southside Beekeepers Club:
Secretary: Ted Cottle
Ph: 0428 429 547
ted@southsidebeekeepers.com.au
7.30pm on the 4th Wed each month at Monterey Secondary College,
21 Silvertop St, Frankston North

Geelong Beekeepers Club
President: Nathan Whitford
0403 807 224
Vice President: Stephen Fridey
info@geelongbeekeepersclub.org.au
Meetings third Friday of month at Belmont Masonic Centre,
25 Regent Street, Belmont

Latrobe Valley Beekeepers Assoc.
President: Sean-Paul Smith
LatrobeValleyBees@gmail.com
Meets 7-9pm first Tuesday each month, Old Moe Netball Courts,
99 Savages Rd. Moe
P.O. Box 323 Newborough 3825
Mob: 0466 041 199

Woodend Bee-Friendly Society
An action group of the Macedon Ranges Sustainability Group
E: wbfs@mrsg.org.au
Meets on the third Sunday of every month (except December) at Woodend Neighbourhood House, 47 Forest Street, Woodend, VIC 3442

South Gippsland Beekeepers Inc. Secretary: Anna Jones
Mob: 0411 770 062
secretary@sgbeekeepers.org.au
Web:http://www.southgippslandbeekeepers.org.au/
Meetings: second Thursday of the month at St Peters Anglican Church Hall, Cnr McCartin St. & Bruce St., Leongatha

Melbourne Beekeepers Club Inc:
Web:melbournebeekeepersclub.org.au
E: secretary@melbournebeekeepersclub.org.au

Northwestern Bee Club Inc.
President: Roger Mitchell
Mob. 0407 427 431
northwesternbeeclub@gmail.com
Web: https://www.nwbee.club/

Mornington Peninsula Beekeepers Association :
P.O. Box 186, Mornington, 3931
Ph: 0401 965 558
E: admin@mpba.org.au
Monthly MPBA Club Meeting - 4th Wednesday of every month at 7pm Mornington Park Pavilion, 9 Flinders Drive, Mornington

Moonee Valley Beekeepers Club Inc. (MVBC Inc.)
Secretary: Paul Kucera
mvbeekeepersclub@gmail.com
Meets at 7:30pm on the second Tuesday of each month (except January) in the hall at
195 Holmes Rd,
Moonee Ponds, VIC 3039

WerriBeeks Inc.
President: Carmel Gerdsen
Secretary: Helen Morland
Treasurer: Debbie Conway
E: werribeeks@gmail.com

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VIC, 3172
Ph: 03 9551 1860
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Beechworth Honey Ltd.
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Corowa,
NSW 2646
Ph: 02 6033 2322
Contact: Steve or
Jodie Goldsworthy

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Beeman Honey & Beekeeping Supplies
2/14-16 Tova Dr.
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Beemanhoney.com.au

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Capilano Honey Ltd
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****

Goode's Honey
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Ph: 03 5152 2180
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Honey Buyers Group
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Alan Redpath
redpaths@redpaths.com.au
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NEW MEMBERS

Dianne Becker
Rose/Damcho Canfield
Michael Egan
Linda Hammond
Michael Knudsen
Yolande Murray
Allan Rak
Lyn Talbot

Do you have any spare copies of the Australian Bee Journal for April 2007?
We need them for the VAA journal archives.
If you can help please contact the Editor
abjeditors@yahoo.com

Classified ads $2.20 per line

VAA members are reminded that they are entitled to one **FREE 6–line classified ad** each year.

Members Notices (births, deaths etc) are always free.

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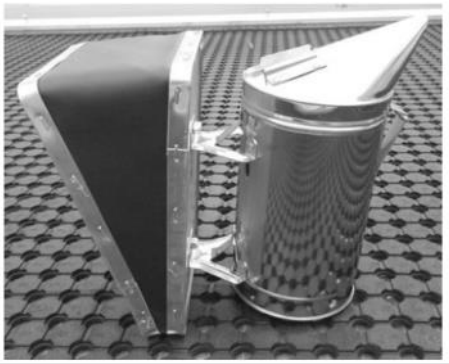

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Hume Global Learning Centre
Sunbury Victoria

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Program & Speakers

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• Heat treatment for varroa	Mike Allerton
• Speech-to-text record keeping	Liz Barbour
• Chemistry of Honey	Liz Barbour
• Sweet Distinction: Elevate your honey brand	Jessica Locarnini
• Winning honey competitions	Peter Adams
• Food safety & compliance	Angelique Drew
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