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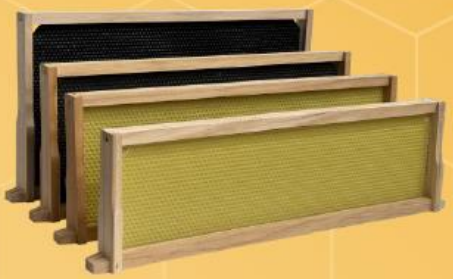

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AUSTRALIAN BEE JOURNAL

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Cover photo: Sacha Knock
Early Spring Swarm

Deadline for copy for the November 2025 journal is
10pm on Saturday 1st of November 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

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The Victorian Apiarists' Association Inc. (VAA)

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.

Management
The VAA Board meets a minimum of six times a year.
Members of the
2025 - 2026 Board

Administration Officer
Tino Corsetti
PO Box 721
Woodend, Victoria, 3442
Mob: 0498 461 460
vaa@vicbeekeepers.com.au
tino.corsetti@vicbeekeepers.com.au

Treasurer
Samantha Muir
treasurer@vicbeekeepers.com.au

President
Lindsay Callaway
(Bendigo Branch representative)
0429 857 835
warral@iinet.net.au

Vice Presidents
Andrew Wootton
0481 392 798
andrew.wootton@gmail.com

Ben Moore
0400 728 796
moore_honey@hotmail.com

Other members:
Tony Wilsmore
(Melbourne Section Rep.)
0400 817 146
tony@suburbanbees.com.au

Richard Collins
0488 199 629
admin@collinshoney.com.au

Olivia Ducommun-Dit-Verron
0468 526 400
o.ducommun-dit-verron@latrobe.edu.au

Millie Enbom-Goad
0400 083 582
millie_enbomgoad@yahoo.com.au

Lachlan Goode
0497 365 963
lachlangoode@gmail.com

Matt Petersen
0407 689 849
sweetdcfhoney@gmail.com

VAA sub-committees & conveners
Contact by email is preferred
Biosecurity
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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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President's Report

Dear Victorian Beekeepers,

I am writing this month's President's Report from Apimondia 2025 in Copenhagen, Denmark. It has been an inspiring and a rewarding experience to spend time with thousands of people from all across the globe who are committed to the health and security of honey bees and the apiculture sector. I look forward to sharing highlights from the conference in our various communications channels such as the Australian Bee Journal, our bi-weekly bulletins and our monthly HiveMeet livestream events.

Victorian beekeepers are experiencing the reality of varroa this season as we are seeing new detections appear on the AgVic/BeeMax heat map, as well as on various beekeeping groups on social media. The VAA thanks all beekeepers who share information with the community and update their BeeMax profiles with varroa mite test results. Our beekeeping practices will need to change this season as we enter the paradigm shift that varroa brings with it. We have heard from beekeepers that drone uncapping can be the testing strategy that reveals the presence of varroa first, earlier than alcohol washes or sugar shakes. Once varroa is detected, monthly alcohol washes, combined with periodic treatments, will be required to monitor and keep mite loads below threshold.

We face a challenging first couple of years finding our feet with varroa management, dealing with mite bombs, until we reach an equilibrium stage (chronic phase), but we will get through this as a community by sharing information, staying current on research and treatment advice and supporting one another.

This was evident to me when meeting a lot of new and old friends at Apimondia. Friends from NSW, NZ, Canada, USA, Netherlands, France, Denmark that all have varroa management experience to share. Some of the best advice:

(a) Late summer/early autumn treatments are the most important, closely followed by the follow up treatment in late autumn. (b) The brood break that many Victorian beekeepers naturally experience in late autumn early winter will be a big advantage in our varroa management.

In September we announced that the VAA has been successful in two grant applications to the Livestock Biosecurity Funds Grant program for 2025. In March and April, two working groups prepared grant applications which were submitted on 14 April. The first grant is to fund a one-year project to develop and publish recommendations on how to preserve and restore degraded Ironbark forests in Victoria. This project builds on work commenced prior to the pandemic that was unable to be completed. This new project will see working groups visit forest sites that represent both well-maintained ecosystems as well as forests that have been

(Continued on page 6)

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST.

Warral Maldon is seeking hives with bee sites.

Dear Beekeeper,

Since 1896 and across five generations, bees have loved Warral. And we love bees. Based in Maldon Victoria, we're now keen to expand across the state and across the border into southern New South Wales. To do so, we are now seeking confidential conversations to explore possible hives and bee sites.

So, if you've been thinking about stepping back, whether before, during or after almonds, I look forward to exploring a stable and respectful handover opportunity with you.

Purchase or transition over time. Succession, part, or complete sale options more than welcome. Confidential conversations assured.

Please send an initial Expression Of Interest to my private email: lindsay@warralmaldon.com.au.

Or call me direct on 0429857835.

Lindsay Callaway – Owner/Managing Director

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BEES LOVE WARRAL. WE LOVE BEES.

WARRAL MALDON

President's Report, cont'd

(Continued from page 5)

left to degrade over time. Ironbark forests are important for Victoria's biodiversity as they are a tree species that tends to thrive in areas of rocky and less fertile soil while still producing abundant nectar and pollen when they do bloom. The Box Ironbark forest is extremely durable, partially because it grows so slowly. As such, without a proactive strategy and care, the Ironbark forests may not recover from past eras of forestry without active human intervention. I would like to thank Judy Leggett, Ian Cane, David Briggs, Andrew McCallum, Ken Gell and Owen Bassett for their contributions to the application and for agreeing to be part of the working group that delivers the project's outcomes.

The second program that was funded by the biosecurity funds program will span three years and will see the VAA receive as much as $50,000 per year. The focus of this project is to review and improve our communication channels that can deliver on biosecurity education. The key focus will be on varroa management and treatment but will span all pests, parasites and diseases that afflict honey bees. The awarding of this grant is well-timed as the Transition to Management (T2M) program funding is ending by February 2026. The VAA is well-positioned to continue and expand its role as a trusted educator. I would like to thank Andrew Wootton, Tony Wilsmore and Olivia Ducommun-Dit-Verron for leading and supporting Tino and me in this project and we will provide updates on both projects through all our communications channels.

By the time October's ABJ is distributed, the VAA will have completed yet another successful year at the Melbourne Royal Show. The Show is such a great opportunity to meet members of the general public to share our passion for honey bees and explain the importance of apiculture to the state. I would like to thank Richard Collins, Judy Leggett, Tony Wilsmore, Peta Dawe and Mike Love for working tirelessly on the Melbourne Show project. We were able to create some new signage, and booth features to align this project to the VAA's new branding. We were excited to have a TV in the booth this year where we were able to showcase all of the 80+ photos submitted to our photo competition back in June.

We also owe thanks to the Moonee Valley Beekeeping Club who worked with our board member, Tony Wilsmore, to provide the bees for our live bee demonstrations in the Bee Cage. Our show would not have been possible without significant donations of honey from a wide range of beekeepers from across the state. Please see our sponsor recognition ad in this magazine (page 35), in our bulletins and on social media. Finally, we had almost 80 VAA members and other volunteers attend the booth over the 11 days of the show to sell honey, speak with the public and build community. We are so fortunate to have such dedicated volunteers to

(Continued on page 7)

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President's Report, cont'd

(Continued from page 6)

help us achieve our goals on behalf of Victorian beekeepers.

The VAA has become more active in recent months in the political sphere. There are many issues impacting the apiculture sector negatively and the VAA plays an important role to communicate these issues to government. We have written several communications to the Ministers for Agriculture and the Environment on topics ranging from varroa management support, bush fire relief and the delays and communication gaps for beekeepers applying for bee sites on public lands. In September we wrote to a cross-bench MP about a new state bill that will bring changes to the way parks will be managed. We noted that such significant legislation was being reviewed by parliament yet lacked any mention of the Apiculture (Beekeeping) on Public Land Policy. We are seeking to engage politicians from all parties to recognise the importance of access to public lands for apiculture.

I hope that your beekeeping season is off to a strong start and that your first spring inspections found your colonies to be strong and healthy. For those of you who discover varroa for the first time this season, know that you are part of a community and within this community there is information, resources and support for you. As mentioned at Apimonidia I met beekeepers from every corner of the world who are managing productive, healthy and profitable apiculture businesses in countries where varroa has been present for years, if not decades. Victorian beekeepers are resilient and resourceful and, together, we will overcome whatever obstacles that are in our path.

Kind regards,
Lindsay Callaway, VAA President

Australian researchers are delving into the secret life of bees in a quest to breed more resilient, productive and happy honey-makers. The nation's first comprehensive honey bee genetic improvement program, Plan Bee, has delivered genetic tools to secure the future of beekeepers. The initiative was led by researchers at NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD), the University of Sydney and the University of New England's Animal Genetics and Breeding Unit (AGBU), with input from the bee industry and seed producers. It has now delivered:

- a national honey bee genetic database
- a breeding manual for beekeepers
- the country's first bee estimated breeding values (EBVs) for key honey bee traits like colony strength, aggression and disease resistance.

For more information visit agrifutures.com.au/plan-bee

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New Books

By John Kennedy

THE OBSERVANT BEEKEEPER

Easily accessible new bee books with enticing titles continue to appear.

The latest from Northern Bee Books in the UK is *The Observant Beekeeper* with the subtitle of *Treatment Free-Low Intervention*.

It's a First Edition softback of 406 pages and is listed at 45 pounds sterling to which $A conversion and postal delivery charges applies.

The author is Paul Honigman, who has been keeping bees in Top Bar and Warre hives for 14 years, and organises the Oxfordshire Natural Beekeepers group.

The publishers note says "this is an expanded version of his Low Intervention training course, with details on not just how to do things, but why, and the pros and cons of the alternatives".

The book is arranged to deliver information quickly, with a logical structure, clear diagrams and trouble shooting guides for use in the apiary when you have to make rapid sense of ambiguous situations.

It is structured in three principal part from getting started and understanding bees, hive and apiary setups; then A Beekeeper's Year - what to expect, check and manage; and finally, Beyond the Basics - covering health, genetics and further reflections.

All told it seems a worthwhile addition to the body of bee books with something useful for everybody.

UK BEE BOOK WINS APIMONDIA GOLD

The UK published, and recently released, bee book – *Where Do Bees Go?* subtitled *An Exploration of key UK forage species for pollinators* – has won a Gold Award at Apimondia.

It is a softback edition of 122 pages and offers multiple chapters.

It is authored by Lesley Jacques and comes from work she carried out in pursuit of the UK's National Diploma in Beekeeping. She also claimed a Master Beekeeper title in 2022 and gained her Diploma in 2024. Lesley resides in Cheshire and is an active member of her local beekeeping association, manages a few hives as well as being a scientist by profession.

The book's focus is on a select group of plant species which are key to honeybees in the British Isles.

Its Gold Award was in the class of Excellence in Beekeeping Literature.

It is available at a cost of 42 Pounds Sterling (with $A conversion and postal delivery) from Northern Bee Books

BOTTOM -UP BEEKEEPING BOOK RELEASED

UK Publisher Northern Bee Books continues to add to its already formidable list of English language bee books (over 350 titles). The latest is a 202 page paperback with the title *Bottom-Up Beekeeping* with the subsidiary title of *Learning from debris on the hive floor*.

It is authored in the main by Ray Baxter, a retired

(Continued on page 9)

New Books cont'd

(Continued from page 8)

biology teacher who is an independent field researcher and scientist.

There are also contributions from Ann Chicott and Christine Coulsting, also both researchers.

The publishers notice says "are you interested in understanding your bees more and disturbing them less?

"Learn how to use the debris from the hive floor as an indicator of colony activity and a way to interpret what is happening inside and outside of the hive".

This book is based on a DIY research project about how the debris from honey bees' changes over a year.

Author Ray uses his observations for a deep dive into scientific literature to explain the debris, and how it relates to beekeeping practice.

There are more than 200 illustrations and high quality images to give a fascinating insight into the life of a honey bee colony.

This work is listed at 27 pounds sterling to which $Aust conversion and postage needs to be added.

Beekeeping, we all know, is a continuous learning process and this work seems to present helpful information in a useful informative way.

POLLEN MICROSCOPY EXPLAINED

I haven't come across any local beekeepers who employ a microscope to aid their work.

Yet I often observe what are obviously important or classic microscopes listed for auction sale in antique or collectable sale catalogues. And usually, they are often complete with a classical wooden box and with quite affordable price expectations, so I conclude a good one is not out of reach.

Now a recent book published in the UK by Northern Bee Books might help inspire more beekeepers to use a microscope as part of their work.

The 256 page paperback is titled *Pollen Microscopy* and is written by Norman Chapman, who is an expert on its application and relevance to beekeeping.

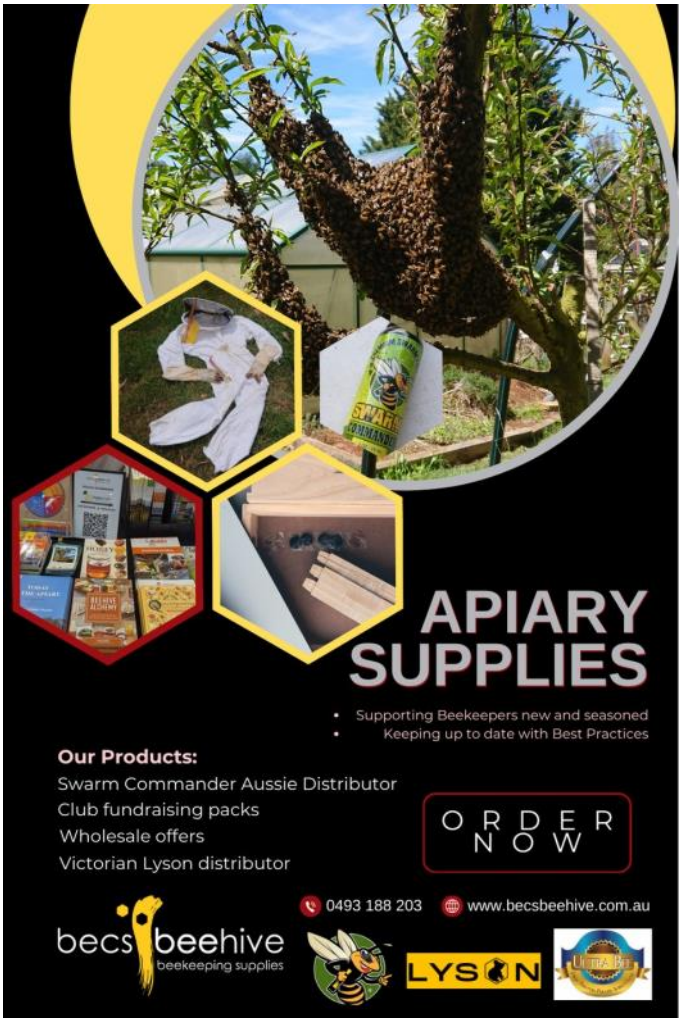
It is a second edition reprint of the original 2018 edition. Importantly it includes over 200 pollen drawings made by the author over 25 years, plus plenty of brief descriptions and colour photos of the flowers from which the pollen is derived.

The introduction notes that "pollen is a fascinating material for anyone interested in looking down a microscope or discovering where their bees have been foraging.

"The variety of sizes and shapes gives clues as to the ingenious ways plants utilise the weather to deliver pollen to its intended destination".

Thus, if you see a benefit in knowing the pollen sources your bees are harvesting, then microscopy will provide the answers.

This work is available at 30 pounds sterling plus $A conversion and delivery costs.



Bendigo Branch Report

My goodness what a busy time of year, pollination, bees expanding, hive management, swarming, grafting, splits, collecting swarms, and Varroa, not necessarily in that order.

For Bendigo Branch, October is the Beekeepers Field Day, with a great deal of planning and work in the lead up, bringing new features as well as the favourite activities.

We are grateful to our 2025 Field Day sponsors the Victorian Apiarists' Association Inc (VAA), Lockwood Beekeeping Supplies and Collins Honey, on-board sponsorship partners for the 2025 Field Day.

In September the Branch held a Spring Management inspection activity, checking brood health, queen productivity, colony congestion, food stores, drone uncapping, and swarm prevention. The hives provided a good diversity of conditions to demonstrate creating space, employing the Demaree method, and artificially swarming with a divider board to reduce swarming. Thanks to Margie, Wayne, Michael, Bill, Barry and Faye for making the day a great success.

At our October meeting Ross Perry provided tips, learnings and equipment recommendations on making a honey warmer to prevent honey crystallising. Ross spoke to the various temperature control methods and each product's pros and cons. Stafford Kelly presented on Varroa testing, his experience using a range of mite test bottles, testing technique, and other essential items to include in our Varroa test kit. Leveraging Staffords' commercial experience, we were briefed on the different acid treatment options currently used, the testing/treatment cadence, and importance of planning treatment options for differing Varroa loads before experiencing the different Varroa loads. Unfortunately, we ran short of time due to the level of interest and abundance of questions, attendees are eagerly looking to Stafford to continue sharing his experience.

On the 24th and 25th of October Bendigo Branch are running an information booth highlighting benefits of bees, branch activities, observation hive, bee related enquires, hopefully our own Dr Ange can share tips on how to talk to queen bees.

At the start of October positive mite tests are being reported around the fringes of Bendigo, check for updates on the BeeMAX map https://bees.agriculture.vic.gov.au/Public/Varroa, make a plan, be vigilant, test, report when you find them, and check in with other beekeepers.

I hope everyone had a great day at the Field Day catching up with friends, new and well-known,

Jamie Trimby

AgriFutures Australia
2026 Rural Women's Award for women with an established project, business or program creating impact, making a difference and/or contributing to enhancing the prosperity of rural and emerging industries, and rural, regional, and remote businesses and communities (applications close Friday 7 November 2025)

The deadline for the December Bee Journal is 10pm on Saturday 1st of December

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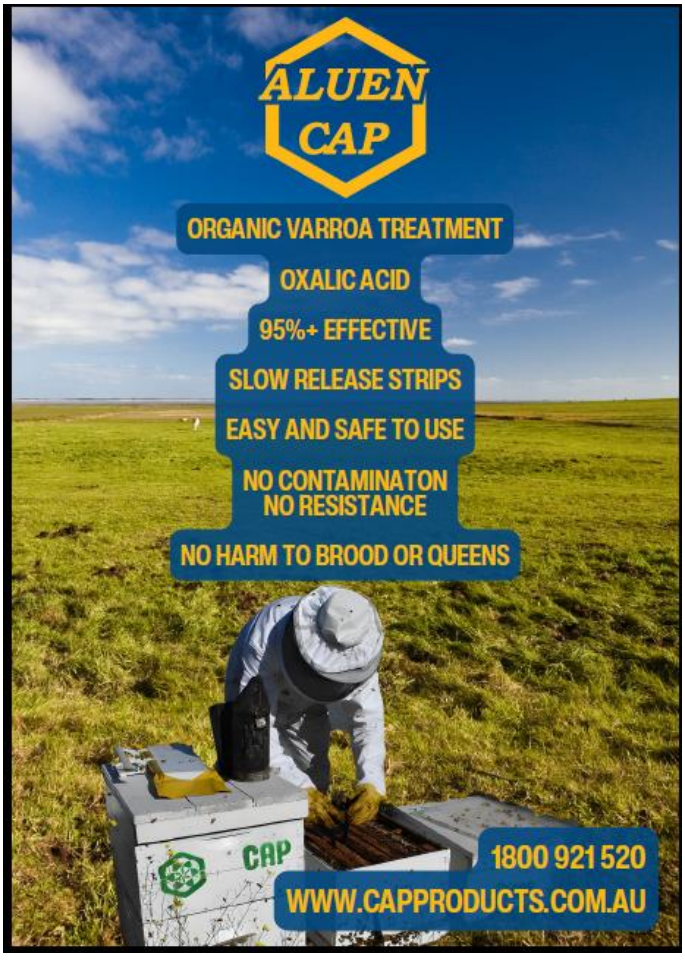

Geelong Report October 2025

The weather is still dry throughout the Geelong Region. This is not unusual as it is in the rain shadow of the Otway Ranges. A surprising amount of Canola has been planted and has flowered in 2 distinct flowerings. The Canola planted dry has flowered a little later than previous years during the first week of August, and the Canola planted after the May rains is flowering mid-September. Unfortunately, the cold gusty winds which have persisted for weeks has resulted in the bees breeding heavily but not storing very much nectar. Some crops are finishing flowering quickly as the ground is too dry.

Faba bean crops are flowering and the perfume from the flowers is very nice.

Swarming especially in the urban areas has occurred on the few warm sunny days. I expect many more swarms will proliferate.

Capeweed has started flowering and with more rain could be very useful as not many other floral sources are available. After a very dry autumn like last season the over grazed paddocks have bare ground which promotes Capeweed to germinate.

A Colac farmer said they are still in drought and have no Clover and a serious lack of water.

Queen rearing has started and with the massive numbers of drones present in the bee hives good matings should happen. The question is what are going to be the best genetics to breed from? I prefer Carniolan queens but will they handle the Varroa? I read an article that suggests that the best queens are bred from the eggs of old queens as they are larger. A prominent Tasmanian beekeeper once told me that he never bred off a queen that was less than 3 years old. The terrible season last year has resulted in many sub-standard queens and drone layers in bee hives that need requeening.

Beekeepers need to consider what they need to do to prepare for Varroa.

No Varroa has been found yet, and hopefully it remains in the distance for as long as possible.

Screened bottom boards I find to be beneficial especially with bee hives on pallets as the water drains from the bee hives regardless of the slope of the ground. Hives keep dry and the debris falls out the screen. I have been using Asian bamboo queen excluders for over 15 years, and these work well as the chalkbrood mummies drop though the gaps, the bee hives stay dry. It is essential to have a sealed lid so the bees retain the warm air. They live in a bubble of air clustered against the top of the bee hive. I use a clear plastic inner cover that seals completely across the top of the box and the bees propolis the edges, making an airtight seal. A benefit is you can open a hive and look through the clear plastic at the cluster of bees without disturbing them.

I suggest beekeepers make an effort to attend beekeeping club meetings. Education and comparing what

(Continued on page 12)

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Geelong Report October 2025, cont'd

(Continued from page 11)

is happening will be vital to surviving the initial Varroa invasion. Recently I have attended 3 excellent meetings at Ballarat, Werribee and Geelong. Discussion and sharing ideas is going to be invaluable.

Around Newcastle, NSW the feral and unmanaged bee hives have died out. The flowering trees do not hum any more and the Australian native bees do not seem to have increased their numbers. They only fly short distances so are more dependent on suitable floral sources being close to their nest. The stingless bees are like little bulldogs and chew the wings and legs off any threats.

Bunnings sell Yates Lawn Grub killer that has Chlorantraniliprole as the active ingredient and this does not affect honey bees but kills the larvae of Small Hive Beetle when they burrow into the ground to pupate. It is active for 6 months, so drench the ground around the bee hives over the summer period when the beetles are a pest.

Western Australia has enjoyed a very wet winter and the Jarrah is budding and has not aborted the budding yet.

South Australian Almond farms are purchasing bees from Western Australia to make up the short fall of bees.

John Edmonds 22/9/2025

Scientists find curvy answer to harnessing "swarm intelligence"
Breakthrough offers way to develop AI to match flocking birds and schooling fish
New York University
Birds flock in order to forage and move more efficiently. Fish school to avoid predators. And bees swarm to reproduce. Recent advances in artificial intelligence have sought to mimic these natural behaviors as a way to potentially improve search-and-rescue operations or to identify areas of wildfire spread over vast areas—largely through coordinated drone or robotic movements. However, developing a means to control and utilize this type of AI—or "swarm intelligence"—has proved challenging.
In a newly published paper (Published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*), an international team of scientists describes a framework designed to advance swarm intelligence—by controlling flocking and swarming in ways that are akin to what occurs in nature.
Read the full article here

Magical Moments

By Andrew Wootton

Beekeeping provides many special moments. Spotting a new queen created by grafting a worker larva into a queen cup is one (yes, it was the biology that made her, but I caused the change from worker to queen). And collecting swarms.

I've loved swarm wrangling since I was a kid helping dad. In memory, these were always in pub gardens, opening an awe-inspiring, off-limits world. I carried the skep, which was our favoured receptacle. And very good it was too, strong, light and with plenty of rough surface for the bees to cling onto. We'd drop the bees into it, invert it over a sheet and add a stone under the lip to form an entrance. Once all the stragglers had mustered, we'd tie up the sheet and depart. The watching bar flies would applaud. Then home to dump our catch in front of their new abode, watching for the queen amongst the marching throng.

So, when a text arrived last week, reporting a swarm on the roof of my local supermarket, I loaded the ladder onto the car, grabbed a nuc box and dustpan and nipped around. Here they are, rather high up! People my age aren't supposed to climb ladders (the Emergency Department is stretched). I ascend and assess, it's a big swarm, spread over a metre of the flashing. Somewhere I've read you are supposed to be able to spot the queen running around on the surface of swarms – I never have, now is no different. Back down for the nuc (one hand) and the dustpan (the other hand) and then back up the ladder, not forgetting to hold on. The dustpan is ideal, gently scooping the bees from the vertical surface and shaking into the nuc. Don't over-reach! Descend, reposition the ladder and back up for a few more scoops. Down, lid on the nuc and watch. Have I got the queen? It's equivocal, the bees don't all exit the nuc, but nor do they start recruiting. Meanwhile, the remainder of the swarm has reclustered – now about half a metre of bees. To speed things up, the spare nuc in the back of the car is emptied of its bee paraphernalia, queen marking pens, straps, lighters, and those rarely used gloves. Back up the ladder for a few more scoops. Below, this now looks more promising, they are fanning and a few of the fliers are recruited. But no, soon they start vacating. It's back up the ladder, this time with the container for shaking frames of bees into when mite washing. Another few scoops and down to add these to the first nuc. Bingo! The whole scene changes dramatically. The air is filled with flying bees as the bees take off from the roof. It's intimidating for the onlookers, not so for me. A glance at the nuc reveals a huge beard of bees clustered on the front. I have the queen at last!

It's always enchanting, indeed the whole experience is a delight. The invitation into someone's private garden. The shared cup of tea while the bees assemble into the box. Explaining the wonders of bee biology to enthralled bystanders. And free bees!

This year I can add them to my apiary without concern. Yes, I know quarantine is advisable, but in practice the risk is minimal. Next year will be different. With brood present, two thirds of varroa mites are reproducing under brood cappings. We can take advantage of a swarm's natural broodless state and hit the mites with oxalic acid, increasing its effectiveness from around 40% to about 95%. Win! Best let the bees settle into their new home for a few days first (you don't want them to abscond) but treat after a week. Give them a great start.

And just suppose the swarm was from your hive (surely not!), this too will be broodless in 3 weeks (they are raising a new queen), so oxalic then for this.

Andrew Wootton is Vice President of the VAA and a certified master beekeeper with the Eastern Apicultural Society of N America. He first started beekeeping in the 1960s.

From AHBIC Update 71

Honeybee Virus Baseline Survey

The National Varroa Management Program has recently completed the National Bee Virus Baseline Project and participating beekeepers will receive contact from department staff to deliver individual results. The nation-wide honey bee virus survey has established a baseline for endemic bee viruses as well as a national knowledge base providing continued confidence that exotic viruses remain absent from our shores. Testing results have provided reassurance that Australia is currently Deform Wing Virus (DWV) free. The program is grateful to all participating beekeepers with over 5,500 samples voluntarily taken from around Australia. Further detailed report can be viewed on the website: National Baseline Project — National Varroa Mite Management Program.

Cross Border Movements

Cross border movement regulations are beginning to relax as Victoria and Queensland confirm the continued inevitable spread of Varroa in their states. Beekeepers must ensure they meet required cross border documentation for each state, with different requirements for hives, queen bees and used equipment.

So far Victoria has removed their permit system, however a health certificate must be granted prior to movement of bees, bee products and used equipment. Details for Victoria can be found on the AgVic website. For movements into Queensland, hives must have below threshold mite levels, management records maintained for 24 months, for all movements into QLD from varroa positive states a permit for varroa mite carrier must be granted which can be found on the QLD DPI website. All other states, check the relevant state and territory websites or the AHBIC interstate hive movement guideline 2025.

Beekeepers Check your Hives!!

AHBIC strongly recommends beekeepers across Australia, especially in South Australia, Western Australia, Northern Territory and Tasmania that it is more important than ever to conduct surveillance on colonies in your care. With spring conditions on the way, checking hives for presence of varroa using one of the preferred methods is essential. In those states free of varroa, if you suspect you have found mites then ring the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline 1800 084 881. This is a stressful time for beekeepers across the industry, and we remind beekeepers that there is support and help if you need it.

Mental health and financial support are available from:

Beyond Blue, 1300 22 46 36
Lifeline, 13 11 14
Rural Aid (Mon to Fri 9am – 5pm), 1300 175 594
Rural Financial Counselling Services

How will Varroa affect your bottom line?

By Rod Bourke,
Bee Biosecurity Officer, NSW, DPI&RD

Costs of managing varroa, your profitability, scaling back and being a better beekeeper than ever.

Recently, Bee Biosecurity Officers have been made aware of and visited a concerning number of commercially sized apiaries with large numbers of weak and dead colonies in them. Some of these apiaries had upwards of 50+% of the hives dead.

Beekeepers running more hives than they can adequately manage has always been a frequent source of major bee biosecurity concerns, as they are never up to date on their bee management, they have a higher incidence of weak or unhealthy hives that do not get properly managed and this leads on to high numbers of dead or extremely weak hives that get robbed out (compared to good beekeepers).

When varroa arrives one of the biggest concerns that all beekeepers have is how will this affect the bottom line. The answer varies greatly depending on many factors, the biggest of which is how good that operator already is.

Once a beekeeper needs to start spending $40-80+/year managing every hive for varroa there is no room for underperforming hives in your operation, so the justification for running huge numbers of hives and not having enough time to manage them properly is just not there anymore. If you want lots of strong singles for almond pollination then it may make better sense to split them early in the new year, add queens and miticides and send pallets of 8 demaree singles to the almonds, but you need to consider how much the additional queens, management, potential autumn-winter honey production loss and varroa costs has this already taken out of the extra $150-180 almond fee. If a heap of them swarm before getting off the almonds, then that could be another opportunity cost (loss) for you (plus producing future mite bombs), and after they get moved you need to go through them all pretty quickly to give space and unite the underperforming ones or they will swarm too.

To manage your hives better the overall aim is to have a lower number of hives per beekeeper, but a far higher percentage of them being high quality production hives to run during the spring honey season. This will enable producing more honey (money) per hive and requiring less miticides (money) and less replacement queens or equipment (money) to be spent on each one. Less hives means you have more time and honey boxes available per hive, so underperforming hives will become far less common in your operation. You may need to hire extra extraction staff though.

For many, adjusting your management to run a smaller number of far better performing hives is the best way to perform spectacularly and become very capable of managing varroa. To calculate a realistic number for

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How will Varroa affect your bottom line? cont'd

(Continued from page 15)

your operation you need to identify how many experienced beekeepers you have in your operation, as well as trainee beekeepers and "gophers", who assist by opening hives, doing all the heavy lifting, miticides and running gear around, so that the beekeepers can spend most of their apiary time with heads in brood boxes fine tuning each honey pump motor. Then you need to determine (realistically) how many hives a beekeeper can do, along with a trainee, and then how many more hives each gopher can add to those first 2 numbers. Those total hive numbers are probably 20-35% lower than they were pre-varroa, or even lower if you really ran far too many.

How long since this dead hive was checked? When there are dozens in a load like this then obviously this operator is running far too many hives for their capabilities
Dead hives that pay no bills and a whole lot of mess.

Hives should have been blocked up/removed and exposed bee materials and rubbish not be left lying around for bees and farm animals to get into.

With varroa, if you are running any more hives than that maximum number then you are already slipping backwards. To be profitable you need to cut out as much waste as you can, as you need to find savings to help cover your additional varroa management costs. Almond pollination prices do not seem to be going up this year, and it looks like some operators/brokers may actually be pushing the price down to gain market share, so almonds will not be covering all your extra varroa costs.

Honey prices aren't currently going up either, so the only way to boost revenue is to run your hives better so that you can achieve more honey production per hive. Unhealthy hives need to be removed from your operation, so stop propping up any with American foulbrood (AFB) and highly consider doing the same for any with severe European foulbrood (EFB) or chalkbrood. If you don't need diseased hives to keep your operation going, then why allow them to be there? If you do need diseased hives, then it's definitely time to clean up your operation. Also invest adequately in small hive beetle (SHB) controls, as every slime-out is also costing your business dearly. Very importantly, also put all your efforts into preventing swarming, building up consistently strong hives and requeening them when it suits, plus regular alcohol washing to see when you need to manage varroa.

Because of varroa management the cost of buying queens will also go up, so be careful sourcing cheap queens as their poor quality may cause far more misses in requeened hives. Some operators will prefer adding queen cells to strong hives and keeping any of the better removed old queens as back-ups in nucs if re-needed. Any partial brood break seen after adding queen cells may assist effectiveness of miticides being used at that time (depending on the product) with synthetics often being considered softer on virgin queens than the acids.

To be as time efficient as you can, you need to try to do as many jobs as possible whenever you have the excluder off, but try to be realistic about this. The longer a hive is open potentially the higher the amount of stress put on the colony, especially when the temperature/conditions are not perfect. Your aim is to get the job done quickly but not miss anything, but you need to know when to call it quits if you are starting to do more damage than good. Added stress is a great synergizer for increasing the presence and ongoing negative effects of EFB, chalkbrood and nosema, so don't push your hive work so far that it causes decreased hive health and therefore decreased profitability.

Sick hives don't pay the bills, so don't make them sick by trying to save time elsewhere or doing something in hives when they really should not have been opened. On that, if you are putting strips into a hive that need to be pulled out during winter/cold temperatures and where you are unlikely to be doing any more brood work, then consider dropping them through the excluder (metal has best spacing for that) so that removal is quicker and less disturbing to the hive in the cold months. When you need to just add strips in a hurry during the season then going through to excluder also works, but the next time you remove the excluder you will need to pull them out and reposition them amongst the brood frames, so don't leave the strips baking in the sun before you do reposition them.

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How will Varroa affect your bottom line? cont'd

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How many kg's of honey has this colony produced recently? Not enough to pay its way, so ultimately the beekeeper and their bottom line is the loser

This one won't be going to almonds…. Hopefully! There is no room in any apiary for a long term neglected beehive like this, let alone having dozens of them in a commercial apiary that is already spending money dealing with varroa.

Another extremely critical part of turning every hive into the best one possible is nutrition, and a hive that gets the best possible nutrition can do almost anything once the brood reared on that source has hatched and gets going. Providing adequate nutrition also assists hives to better deal with varroa, as the mites are after all sucking the goodness right out of your bees. Bees under nutritional stress (not enough pollen, or not good enough pollen) always fail quicker than healthy fat bees when varroa is increasing within a hive, so ensure that your bees are getting the very best possible nutrition.

A really important aspect for ensuring that is proper site selection. A lot of beekeepers are extremely rigid when it comes to how many hives they place on a site, often based exactly around how many they can fit on a truck and justifying that with "economics". The first thing that needs to be assessed with any particular site is it's potential "holding capacity", and can it provide enough good quality pollen for your hives as well as those of all the other nearby beekeepers. If it can then great, but as is often the case it cannot, so often your only achievable options are.

- reduce the overall number of hives on your site
- supplementary feeding

If there is absolutely no way that you can take between 1/4 and 1/2 of your hives to another site a few km away (especially if it is because of "economics") then you will need to spend money on either supplementary feeding (when sitting amongst other beekeepers patties are better than open feeding, unless you like sharing) or accept that the overall condition of your bees is likely to decline (although you may not see that for some time). Both of those options also affect the "economics" of your operation, so I strongly suggest that you weigh this all up and see if there is actually some merit in temporarily splitting loads of bees to reduce any deficiencies in pollen and perhaps achieve far better results per hive (that may also affect your "economics").

The brood box is the motor that runs your honey pump, so to best achieve this your job as a beekeeper is to breed up heaps of healthy bees, very importantly don't then let them swarm, quickly remove all their honey and at the same time give them lots of empty boxes that they will need to work on to fill up again. That all takes available time and not getting there late, and now also adding in varroa management, so take that job very seriously and allow enough time to do it, or you will fail at it.

If the entire varroa situation is really hard for you as a beekeeper to grasp, then my recommendations are to consider the following options.

- sell as many hives as you need to get down to a smaller size that you are comfortably able to handle. Learn about managing varroa and once competent and confident decide how many hives you would actually like to run.
- sell up and retire. Ensure your hives are healthy when you sell, and accept that currently (due to varroa) that hives may not be "worth" as much as they recently were pre-varroa in 2022 etc.

I am here to help, so please contact me on 0438 677 195 or rod.bourke@dpird.nsw.gov.au if you would like to have a confidential discussion about your own situation.

This article was first published in the Honeybee News

AgriFutures Australia
2026 Rural Women's Acceleration Grant for women with an idea, cause or vision not yet realised or launched that will positively impact rural and emerging industries, and rural, regional, and remote businesses and communities (applications close Friday 7 November 2025)

Les Crowder Comments After Speaking Tour

By John Kennedy

US based natural beekeeper, Les Crowder, has completed his local speaking tour with apparently well attended presentations in NSW, the ACT and Queensland.

He also featured at the well promoted Natural Beekeeping Conference, held over two days in NSW.

He has subsequently commented in a blog post on his return home noting that "when varroa arrives on shores where bees are naïve to its presence, it does not knock politely.

"It tears through apiaries like wildfire overwhelming colonies with no natural defences.

"Losses of defenceless colonies often exceed 80%, leaving even the most passionate beekeepers shaken to their core".

He adds "I do understand the instinct to protect bees with medicines poisons and interventions aimed at killing mites.

"I have stood over struggling colonies, wondering if is it kinder to step back and let Nature take its course, even if it means their end, or to intervene in an attempt to save their genetics, or simply shorten their suffering by actively culling them out of the gene pool?

"But I could never fathom subjecting my bees to toxic or caustic treatments when I knew I could, one day, consume that honey".

Crowder notes that in the USA "I manage nearly 400 thriving treatment-free colonies where varroa has been endemic for over three decade.

"I did not save them, I watched them save themselves.

"Overtime bees and mite reached balance, a delicate mix of predator and host where both can coexist.

He says that Australia is now at the crossroads, where the US stood over 30 years ago, facing losses that will be difficult.

Adding "it will be tempting to fight Nature, to prop up weak genetics, and to embark on a never-ending treadmill of beekeeper interventions and pesticides for the sake of saving all the bees, even the unfit ones.

Crowders blog which is headed "A Message of Hope for Australian Beekeepers", along with other information on his business, is available from his website

AgriFutures Australia
Australian Rural Leadership Foundation's Australian Rural Leadership Program (ARLP) supports individuals who want to respond to regional, rural, and remote Australia's most complex challenges (applications now open)

Running Your Bees At Full Throttle

Running your bees at full throttle to keep ahead of varroa.

By Rod Bourke,
Bee Biosecurity Officer, NSW, DPI&RD

As varroa becomes more established there will be a lot of opportunity for beekeepers, at least for those beekeepers that still have live bee hives. Unfortunately, there will be a proportion of our current beekeeping community that will not be able to keep their hives alive. They will eventually either realise that they need to greatly improve themselves to stay on in the industry, or that it is all getting too hard and that beekeeping is no longer viable for them. Some do not realise this, but after losing all their hives they simply cannot afford to buy more hives and then never restart. Others will restart but may never be able to become viable.

For decades before varroa arrived, too many beekeepers have been running far more hives that they can properly manage, but the luck that enabled them to just get by dries up once varroa mite is added to the beekeeping equation. The good old days are over, so it is time to forget them and get on with the extra work we must now do to keep our bees healthy and productive. Wherever varroa has arrived in the world it has always been very hard on the type of operator that runs more hives than they should, as it exposes and puts additional pressure on all the other poor beekeeping practices that were already being undertaken.

Whatever the case, if your beekeeping operation is suffering from unmanaged varroa and other bee pests and diseases then your bees are not performing optimally, and your operation is probably minimally or not at all profitable. To run your beekeeping operation successfully you need to have good healthy bees, so if you are not achieving this and varroa is taking them down then your operation is currently failing.

This colony has newly hatched bees with deformed wings and lots of mites, so it is almost finished as their health and vitality has greatly diminished.

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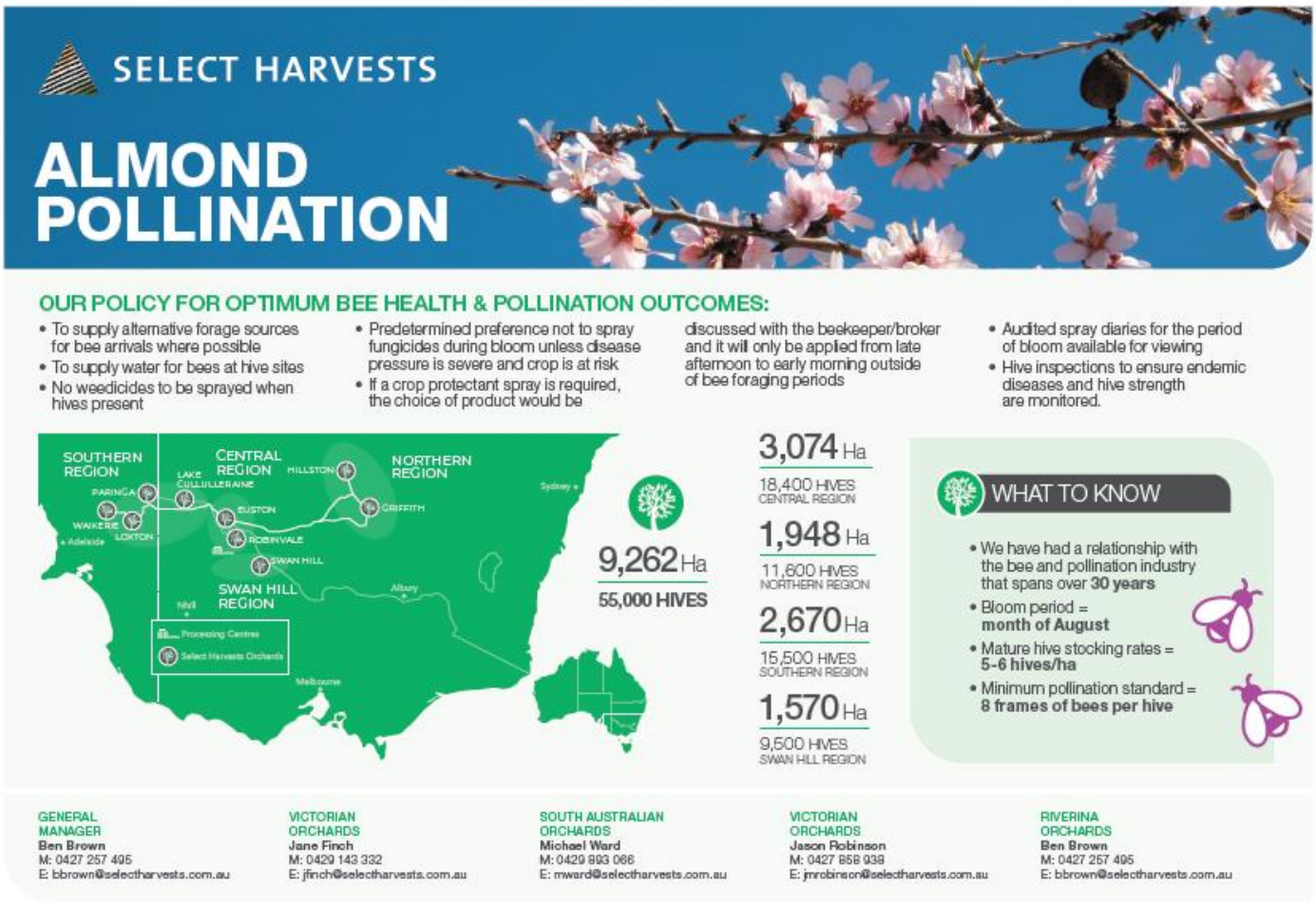

Running Your Bees At Full Throttle, cont'd

(Continued from page 19)

When you see mites in uncapped brood, mites on bees and deformed wings means this hive was not treated properly and is so weakened that SHB can take it out whenever they want. They don't produce any honey either!

During the period that those hives are failing (but still existing on apiary sites) they will be a major biosecurity risk to every other beehive around them. There are two really good ways that this biosecurity and financial catastrophe can be avoided, either by selling up before this stage is reached or by taking the bull by the horns and going hard at becoming a better beekeeper.

Leaving the industry can be a very hard decision to make but one that's made easier with a path to follow: start considering the following:

- How many hives of good quality do you have left
- How many weak hives do you have that could be united to make viable colonies, or pulled out
- How many diseased hives need to be pulled out and burned/irradiated
- How many Public Lands sites (paid up or transferrable) do you have that are valuable and give security to a buyer
- How many viable private sites do you have that a buyer may have some interest in (remembering that such sites are often not very secure and can be more easily lost)
- How much remaining value does your plant, excess bee equipment and any trucks or other machinery have.

Often sellers want a far higher price than everything is worth to a buyer in a current market, so in a time like now when honey prices are low and varroa is rampaging through the countryside you do need to be realistic about how much everything is worth. The sale price of your hives may not be much at all, but when you consider that you were experiencing high hive losses, then getting something for your remaining hives is better

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Running Your Bees At Full Throttle, cont'd

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than nothing. Don't fall into that trap of saying that you cannot afford to treat…if you spend $10 per hive on one treatment and then sell the hive for even $200-250 (or got 2-3 boxes of honey off it) then you got a lot more for it than if you skipped the treatment and just let it die.

A struggling beekeeper selling their bees and getting out is going to save other beekeepers around them much anguish if those failing colonies (that are becoming mite and AFB bombs) become managed ones by someone else. Cattle and sheep get bought and sold every day when forage and seasonal conditions dictate, and it should be exactly the same for beehives if high numbers cannot be adequately supported by their current owner.

Upskilling

If you know that you need assistance or have done a poor job managing varroa and acknowledge that you need to do better than you have then there are many pathways you can take to improve yourself as a beekeeper.

1- Contact the Varroa Development Officers to get them to visit and assist you to manage your current varroa situation. - www.varroa.org.au

2- If you also have other pest or disease issues then ask your VDO if they can bring a BBO along too, as they can offer ongoing assistance to enable you to clean up your American foulbrood (AFB) and other issues that are affecting your hive health.

3- Do varroa training, in person or online via www.varroa.org.au

Bee Biosecurity (Bee Pest and Disease) training is also available through Tocal College and your BBO.

4- Align yourself with another operator that is managing their varroa well and learn some tricks from them. A good mentor is a valuable resource so you may find it best to do some work with them to really learn how they operate.

5- Prepare yourself to try, learn and do new things. Just because you did beekeeping a particular way for a long time does not mean that is the right way to continue operating now. Varroa mite changes everything, so you need to change your beekeeping to respond to that changing situation.

6- Look at your operation and work out what is generating income for you and what is a realistic number of hives to run. A lot of beekeepers fall into the trap of thinking more hives make more money, but the reality is that is completely wrong. You need to look at how much income each hive generates per year, and to be truly successful that should be a high number.

7- Run fewer but high-quality hives. You may factor in that every one of your hives are going to do an almond and/or other pollination job, plus make a lot of honey. The reality is that if you have many weak, poorly managed low-quality colonies then they will either get rejected from pollination, or a smaller percentage of them be paid for. Either way, inferior quality hives can cost you a lot of money (pollination that you were not

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1 — 10	$32.00 each
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Prices as from 1/9/2020

Terms 7 days - Late Payments - add $4 Per Queen

BANK ACCOUNT DETAILS AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

Running Your Bees At Full Throttle, cont'd

(Continued from page 21)

paid for), plus wasted spots on a truck where better hives could have been. Transporting non-paying hives (dead wood) to a honey flow or pollination job means a higher transport cost is allocated to every real hive in the load, which is just plain poor business.

Finding this means you were 3-6 months late in doing an alcohol wash. When you find a mite on the queen she is really struggling, and the hive is almost dead.

If every one of the hives on your truck is up to scratch, then you have minimised the transport cost of each hive to its lowest possible amount, increasing the profit margin that you gain from the pollination fee or honey production for each hive. Profit enables miticides, fuel, truck services and wages to be paid, that keep the operation running smoothly.

By running 300-400 awesome colonies per qualified beekeeper instead of a higher number of weaker colonies (that perform poorly) then you will have far more time to manage each hive, reduce swarming (that reduces feral mite bombs), achieve significantly higher honey yields per colony (because each hive is higher quality) and outlay lower costs for miticides too (as you are not wasting dollars treating dead-wood colonies that provide you with nothing in return).

It is now time to re-evaluate your operation and determine how many less hives you may need to run per beekeeper to keep in front of varroa, or how many more beekeepers you may need to put on to manage your current numbers appropriately. This may also be a great opportunity for you to cull out any AFB hives that you have been propping up with antibiotics, so if you would like assistance managing your current internal AFB problem (with the eventual aim to run a clean operation without the regular use of antibiotics) then send an email to bee.biosecurity@dpi.nsw.gov.au or call me on 0438 677 195.

The BBO team regularly assists beekeepers in this

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Running Your Bees At Full Throttle, cont'd

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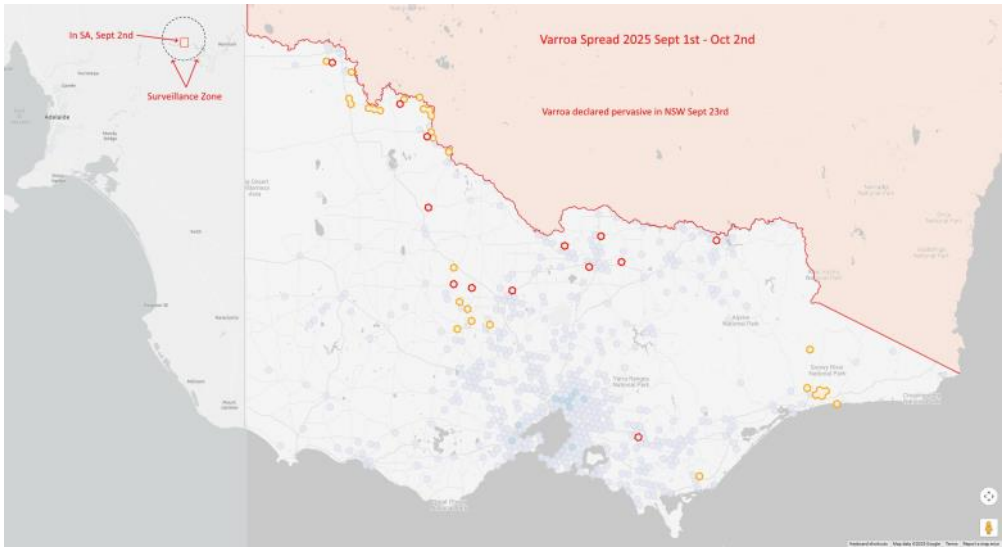
regard, as beekeeping without AFB is a far better way to operate, instead of masking it and allowing it to continue spreading further within your operation and at the same time devaluing it at a future time when you may want to sell. With varroa now taking its own toll on your bees who needs to also be propping up a heap of diseased hives that will cause a whole lot more problems if varroa weakens them and they get robbed out. Time to run your bees at full throttle to keep ahead of varroa.

This article was first published in Honeybee News

Varroa Spread Sept 1st to Oct 2nd 2025



Help

The ABJ would really like some of your photos to use in the journal. Please send any bee or honey related photos to abjeditors@yahoo.com

Photo: Jamie Trimby - Unknown Eucalyptus

GIPPSLAND APIARISTS ASSOCIATION INC.
FIELD DAY – VARROA FOCUS

SATURDAY, 15TH NOVEMBER, 2025

VENUE: GIPPSLAND AGRICULTURAL GROUP INC
345 BENGWORDEN ROAD, BAIRNSDALE

PROGRAM

9.30a.m.	Registration, tea/coffee and networking
10.00a.m.	Welcome - GAA President
10.15a.m.	Varroa situation update- Presented by Varroa Development Officers • Varroa monitoring and surveillance • Miticide use • Mechanical methods of control
11.00a.m.	Morning tea
11.30a.m.	Opening hives – Demonstrate monitoring/surveillance – Facilitated by VDO's ***Beekeepers are required to bring their own freshly laundered bee suit and gloves*** Alternative: Breeding up bees and varroa resistant queens
12.30p.m.	Lunch (included in cost) Mixed Grill with salad - provided by Bairnsdale Lions Club
1.30p.m.	Reporting results and records – presented by VDO's • Developing a treatment plan • Explanation of management plan worksheets
2.15 p.m.	ZOOM – What is currently happening in NSW?
2.45p.m.	Beekeeper support discussion/resources Q & A
3.30p.m.	Finish

If you require any further information please contact:
Bill Brennan
0468 417 787

GAA Bank Deposit details:

National Australia Bank
BSB: 083 519
Account No. 04 9227767

***Cost for the Field Day is $25 – to be paid with Registration.** Please add your name and the Field Day as a reference.

To register, email the GAA Treasurer, Sue Harding, suegaa@aussiebb.com.au Payment is required with Registration. Please complete by 1st November, 2025.

REGISTER NOW

Will Varroa Kill The Demaree?

The aim of this article is to help small-scale beekeepers prepare for varroa and rethink traditional approaches to swarm management.

For many years, methods such as moving brood frames into the honey super, or placing the entire brood box above the honey super while leaving the queen behind (the **Demaree method**), have been standard tools to reduce swarming. These strategies create laying space for the queen and convince the colony that it has already swarmed.

However, varroa changes this picture. Most beekeepers will now need to use synthetic miticides to control the mite. Unfortunately, these products can leave chemical residues in brood combs. If brood frames are later moved into honey supers, they may contaminate honey or wax intended for human consumption. As a result, once miticides are used, **brood frames should never be transferred into honey supers**. This effectively removes the Demaree method as a safe option. There are some beekeepers that combine a Demaree method with bleeding off bees using a bee escape to overcome the frames becoming honey frames (see Melbourne Beekeepers Club YouTube on this at https://youtu.be/_uhIiBhVZ_M?si=hfYuUj8B0bPMzF5H). However this approach is time consuming and fiddly.

So where does that leave us?

Fortunately, the standard practice of **splitting hives** remains effective. While there are many variations, most follow the same principles:

Find the queen and keep her in the original brood box.

Transfer one frame of honey, one frame of pollen, two frames of brood (with eggs), and one frame of foundation into a new box, ensuring good coverage of nurse bees.

Add either a queen cell, a caged queen, or allow the colony to raise its own.

Replace the removed frames in the original box with foundation or drawn comb.

Now you have two colonies - a useful hedge against higher losses expected with varroa.

If you don't want to increase colony numbers permanently, wait until after swarming season and use the newspaper method to recombine the colonies. You may also allow the queens to resolve dominance naturally, or experiment with a two-queen arrangement using a queen excluder.

The Takeaway

Varroa forces us to adapt. Beekeepers can no longer rely on some old favourites like the Demaree method, but other tools remain at hand. Splitting colonies, maintaining spare equipment, and carefully planning seasonal management will be essential.

Varroa will require all of us to become more skilled, thoughtful beekeepers. The time to prepare is now.

Tony Wilsmore
Suburban Bees

Testing Miticides Alongside Each Other

Dr Madlen Kratz
M: 0427 348 521
E:madlen.kratz@dpi.nsw.gov.au
Tocal Agricultural College (815 Tocal Road Paterson NSW 2421)
NSW Department of Primary Industries

There is still a lot to learn about how often we may have to treat colonies with miticides and their effectiveness under various environmental conditions throughout the year and region to region. This can be a tough and costly decision for larger beekeeping operations.

For the purpose of this article, I would like to share an experience of using a synthetic versus a non-synthetic miticide treatment on 50 colonies at the same apiary.

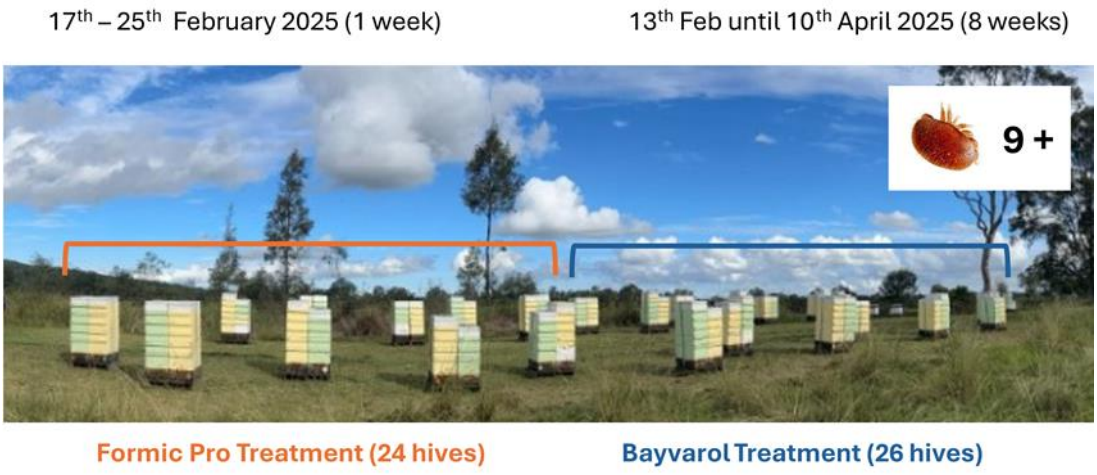
This trial was conducted at Tocal Agricultural College with help from our current NSW Varroa Development Officers Slavi Nenov and Emily Noordyke.

Mite free research apiary

Prior to the trial the 50 colonies were located 2hrs north of Tocal near Old Bar (NSW). The hives were brought to Old Bar from a mite free location in January 2023. The first-time mites were detected in the hives was at the end of October 2024. At the time 14% of the hives were infested with 1 mite in an alcohol wash. The remaining 86% of hives showed no detectable mites in an alcohol wash. What surprised me to some extent was how much variation there was in mite numbers between hives over the next couple of months even though all hives were balanced for strength and getting infested at the same location for the first time. Mite counts in alcohol washes ranged from 4 to 14 ~ 2.5 months later (mid- January 2025). By this time the colonies were ready for their first mite treatment (9+ mites as the recommended treatment threshold over the summer months). Noting, that best practice is to treat all hives in an apiary, even if a small percentage of hives is still below recommended treatment threshold. The reason being that hives at the same apiary can re-infest each other with mites through for example drifting or robbing.

The 1st mite treatment – Bayvarol vs Formic Pro

We brought the colonies back to Tocal for research reasons, which delayed the treatment until mid-February, but to our 'delight' provided a perfect opportunity with a window of cooler temperatures to compare two miticide treatments alongside each other.



We treated 26 hives with Bayvarol (a synthetic miticide: Flumethrin) and 24 hives with Formic Pro (a non-synthestic miticide: Formic acid). At this point the hives had between 3 – 36 mites in an alcohol wash of 300 bees (mid – February).

Bayvarol and Formic Pro miticides work in

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US HONEY CONSUMPTION AT ALL TIME RECORD
By John Kennedy

The latest 2025 USDA Economic Research Service's Sugar and Sweetener Yearbook tables for 2024 concludes that their honey consumption, and made with honey products, has reached an all-time high of 688.6 million pounds, topping the previous 2021 record of 618 million pounds.
Their data also shows a record increase of 25% or two pounds per person over the past two years.
The USDA summary says that "over a 30 year period, US demand for honey products has continued to trend upwards due to its classification as a "superfood" that benefits overall health and well-being, as well as being perceived as a healthier alternative to table sugar.
"Over time, honey has become the preferred sweetener because it's an all-natural, minimally processed sweetener and when you choose honey, you are not only supporting a beekeeper. but the entire honey bee population that protects and pollinates our food ecosystem".

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

Testing Miticides Alongside Each Other, cont'd

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very different ways as summarised in Table 1.

Active Ingredient and formulation	**Flumethrin** (synthetic pyrethroid) in impregnated strip	**Formic acid** (organic acid). Formic acid formulated in a saccharide gel strip.
Treatment Period	6-8 weeks	7 days
Effectiveness	95.99% (where mites are not resistant)	61-98%. Highly variable due to temperature.
Targets	Phoretic mites on adult bees	Phoretic mites on adult bees and mites in brood (up to 60%)
Resistance Risk	Yes, if used off label or sequentially with other products with the same MOA (e.g. Apistan™).	No.
Mode of Action (MOA)	Contact. Targets Varroa nervous system causing fatal failure and muscle spasms. Same MOA as Apistan ™. Rotate with products with different MOA.	Fumigation. Inhibits cellular respiration causing respiratory acidosis.
Conditions for Use and Withholding Period (WHP)	4 Bayvarol™ strips per brood box in a full colony for 6-8 weeks OR 2 strip for 6-8 weeks in a nucleus colony. CAN BE used when supers are present (Schedule 5 Poison).	2 strips above brood box in a full colony for 7 days. Colony must have full open entrance and closed bottom board if ventilated. Environmental temperature must be between 10-29.5°C. May cause colony agitation. DO NOT use in nucleus colonies. Only full size colonies with 6 or more frames fully covered by bees can be treated.
Contamination Risks	Hive products, including wax. DO NOT SELL COMB HONEY, DO NOT MAKE BEESWAX. Honey extracted from the brood box must be tested for maximum residue levels (MRLs).	Hive products, including wax. May taint honey.
Residues	Accumulates in brood combs with repeated application. Residues in propolis.	Honey taste, observe withholding period as per product label.

Table 1. Some comparisons of Bayvarol and Formic Pro as a miticide. Adapted from varroa.org.au

This is one of the challenges in comparing miticides with different modes of action, treatment times and so on. However, this trial allowed us to see how effective a particular miticide is to another at one point in time! I would like to emphasize that because especially the non-synthetic treatments are much more dependent on environmental factors, so it wouldn't be fair to judge its effectiveness as a whole against one point in time.

For that reason, I would like to encourage all beekeepers to take detailed notes when applying miticide treatments such as:

- Hive status (strength, disease status, amount of brood, queen age)
- Hive configuration (number of supers, entrance width, type of bottom board)
- Environmental conditions (temperature, humidity, floral resources)
- Effectiveness (testing mite loads before and after treatment)
- Cost of treatment

The above records will help you gain a better understanding about what treatments may be more suitable under what conditions and time of year across your beekeeping environments.

This was the second time I have used Formic Pro as a treatment on hives within the last 18 months. The first time was on 7 hives located at Tocal in June 2024. As you can see in Table 2, the effectiveness of formic acid varied across time periods and environmental conditions. In June 2024 the mite treatment was more effective than in February 2025. The environmental conditions were also much better in June 2024 (spotted gum flowering) compared to February 2025 (grey box flowering). Luckily, the bees came back to grey box with some good tea tree pollen stores from the coast. The bees in June 2024 were of similar colony strength but with less brood at that time of the year

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Testing Miticides Alongside Each Other, cont'd

(Continued from page 27)

(~15 frames of bees, 4 frames of brood including 0.5 frames of drone brood) than bees in February 2025 (~14.5 frames of bees, 6.4 frames of brood including 0.5 frames of drone brood).

In both instances there was a large variation in treatment effectiveness between hives ranging from 17 – 88% in June 2024 and 4 - 67% in February 2025.

	Jun 2024	Feb 2025
No. of hives treated	7	24
No. of hives where mites reduced	7/7	14/24
Mite count (range) before treatment	5 - 15	3 - 36
Average mite count/ alcohol wash before treatment	9	19
Recommended mite threshold	6 +	9 +
Mite reduction across all hives	41%	8%
Mite reduction when treatment worked	41%	32%
Mite count (range) after treatment	2 - 8	6 - 41
Average mite count/ alcohol wash after treatment	5	17.5

Table 2. *Treatment outcome of Formic Pro over two points in time.*

Temperatures

Formic Pro can only be applied with an outside temperature range of 10-29.5°C. The first 3 days of treatment with Formic Pro are the most critical that temperatures stay between 10-29.5°C.

In June 2024 the temperatures ranged between min: 5.7 – 12.8°C and max: 17.2- 19.9°C during the day. In February the temperatures ranged between min: 10.8 – 22.5°C and max: 24.2 and 36.8°C. Noting that the 36.8°C was on the last day before the formic treatment was being removed.

Lost queens

We assessed all colonies for their queen presence (all marked and clipped) before and after applying Formic Pro and Bayvarol treatments (Figure 1). No queens were lost during either treatment. In the case of Formic Pro treated hives, this was the case for both June 2024 and February 2025. However, the queens stopped laying for a few days after applying Formic Pro treatments, which we could tell by the age of the brood. Queens were laying well again after the initial few days.

Queen age

Jun 2024: 18 months

Feb 2025: 6 – 14 months

Figure 1.
Clipped and marked queen.

Dead bees

Beekeepers have previously reported piles of dead bees at the entrance of hives post formic acid treatments. We did not observe any more dead bees than you would normally see at the hive entrance. The bees however immediately responded to the formic acid once placed inside the hive, by increasing their fanning behaviour and bees were seen bearding at the front of the hive (Figure 2, 3).

Figure 2 (right). *Bees bearding at the hive entrance. Note: These hives have ventilated bottom board pollen traps, which were blocked off with a vinyl mat during treatment*.

Testing Miticides Alongside Each Other, cont'd

(Continued from page 28)

Figure 3. Formic Pro pads applied above the brood nest.

All hives treated with Bayvarol showed up with zero mites in an alcohol wash 8 weeks later (max. treatment period).

A note on re-queening

Beekeepers have been asking about the re-queening success during or after treatment. From overseas experience, synthetic treatments are much safer when it comes to re-queening success during treatment. In either case, it's better to avoid re-queening (when possible) while treating hives for mites.

During the trial in February 2025 we re-queened some Formic Pro treated hives straight after the pads were removed with 100% success in poor weather conditions (overcast and drizzly). At the same time some of the Bayvarol hives were requeened (3 weeks into the treatment) with all queens being accepted.

The caveat with synthetics vs non-synthetics

Synthetic chemicals are 'easy' to use. At least for now, they are highly effective against mites and once applied, you 'just' need to keep an eye on your calendar for when they need to be taken out again. They also provide an extended treatment period of a minimum of two brood cycles (6 weeks). Over time however, they are the first chemicals that mites can build up resistance to for various reasons and their effectiveness diminishes. This can be seen around the world with, for example, Bayvarol simply not being effective anymore due to having become a heavily used treatment option in various countries. Back-to-back use of a miticide with the same mode of action (they kill the mites the same way) is one major route of resistance.

Non-synthetic treatments such as formic acid and oxalic acid are much more difficult to use. They are much more variable and dependent on climatic conditions, hive strength and mite loads. In most cases non-synthetic treatments are simply not effective enough in reducing mite numbers below threshold once mite numbers in colonies are too high or in areas of high reinfestation. At the same time, the way these acids work against mites makes it very hard for mites to build up any resistance.

During times of heavy reinfestation some beekeepers may not have any other options than to rely on synthetic treatments. This hopefully will change once mite numbers plateau out in the environment. For more information on the miticides used in this trial use the QR codes below:

Bayvarol resources including permit, safety data sheet, product information and usage video can be found at Varroa.org.au:

Formic Pro resources including permit, safety data sheet, product information and usage video can be found at Varroa.org.au:

An eye for the sky
University of Konstanz
The hunt for nectar can take honeybees kilometres away from their hive into unknown territory – and yet, they always find their way back. The sun's position in the sky serves as a kind of compass for bees, even when clouds or other objects block it from view. They owe this ability to the special structure of their complex eyes, which they use to analyze patterns of polarized light in the sky that are invisible to humans.
Read the story here

AHBIC Chair Quarterly Report

Pollination Services

The importance of pollination is gaining further traction, reports of paid pollination service requirements are growing. As we witness Varroa spread and have an impact on feral and kept colonies, opportunities will arise for further pollination revenue.

Under the new way of beekeeping, it has been suggested that our traditional 'hunter gatherer' style of beekeeping will diminish, and beekeepers will be forced to focus more on hive health and less on driving trucks. Rather than pollination being an afterthought of honey production, intense preparation will be required to provide a professional service to the Horticulture sector. The coming years will be tough, being a period of transition, opportunity will arise.

Honey market

Honey production forecasts appear to be average to reasonable in many areas, although many regions or entire states need rain. Reports of stockpiles significantly reducing in beekeepers and packers' sheds are common. This is due to production reducing and consumption increasing domestically as well as increased export markets. Honey prices must rise for the industries viability.

AHBIC continues to address the concerning imported honey issue. While import quantities remain relatively consistent, we must ensure those imports are on a fair playing field and do not pose a biosecurity threat to Australian bees. Previous studies have indicated that Deformed Wing Virus (DWV) is not present in Australia. This has been confirmed in the recent national virus baseline study conducted under the transition to management program. Varroa is bad enough but DWV with Varroa is a deadly combination we don't want. Australia must do all that we can to remain DWV free. With encouragement from AHBIC, Dr John Roberts from CSIRO is conducting studies via AgriFutures Honey Bee and Pollination Panel to determine the risk of DWV entering Australia via imported honey. Read more here https://agrifutures.com.au/related-projects/transmission-of-deformed-wing-virus-dwv-via-imported-honey/

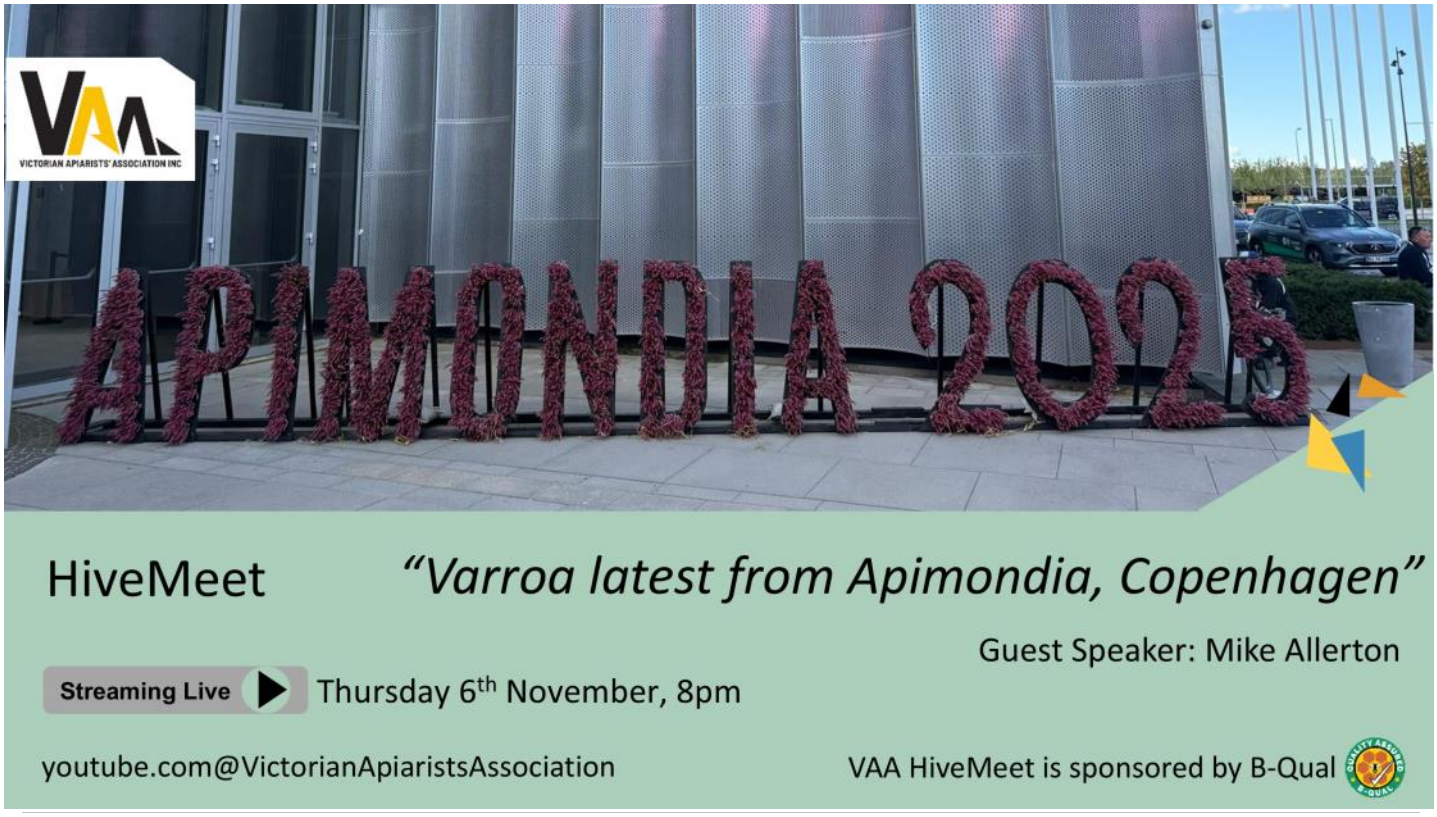
The bigger goal is to strengthen the inadequate import protocols for honey entering Australia. AHBIC are consistently lobbying DAFF for a review. As a result, DAFF have committed to work with the National Measurement Institute to establish if more modern testing protocols can be adopted. AHBIC have also made the Federal Minister for Agriculture aware of the situation. AHBIC are hopeful that we can provide more information soon.

Varroa Spread

As expected, Varroa is spreading further throughout NSW, QLD and Victoria. Despite the implications of border restrictions, the 'slow the spread' plan has worked, and it has given some operators time to prepare. Movement regulations between the said states have become reduced for hives, still requiring a bee health certificate, we hope queens will follow with further deregulation in the coming months.

Unfortunately, Varroa has been detected for the first time in SA. It was detected in one apiary imported from Queensland. The apiary was in isolation with other Queensland bees and has since been removed from SA. We hope that Varroa was not spread into the environment or in low levels at the least. Tasmania have constructed a plan for if varroa is detected, while WA are strongly lobbying their government for support to mitigate the risk.

Jon Lockwood, AHBIC Chair



AgriFutures Update

Beekeepers: 390+ hours on Varroa protection per year. Is this true for you?

Australian beekeepers are being urged to share their experiences in the 2025 Australian Colony Loss (COLOSS) Survey, as the industry faces rising costs and labour demands from Varroa destructor (Varroa) management.

The 2024 COLOSS Survey revealed that Varroa is costing the honey bee industry more than just dollars, with labour impacts also increasing. The 2025 survey is now open (closing 1 November 2025), and the industry is seeking a clearer picture of the ongoing impact.

Beekeepers are encouraged to take part in this important survey at www.coloss.au.

Cost per hive, cost of time

Almost 1,000 beekeepers provided data on more than 120,000 colonies in the landmark 2024 survey, providing a snapshot of the challenges facing an industry that contributes an estimated $14 billion to the Australian economy. The 2024 COLOSS survey report showed that in NSW, where Varroa was first identified, beekeepers are spending an average of 23.5 minutes and $21 per hive on management and treatment. For a commercial operation with 1,000 hives, this equates to an annual cost of an estimated $21,000 and 392 hours (10+ work weeks) of additional labour.

With beekeepers dedicating an average of over 10 working weeks each year to the specialised management and treatment of Varroa, less time is available for other essential tasks, such as proactive hive care and environmental management, which may suffer as a result.

Varroa is one of the many challenges facing the Australian honey bee industry that the industry is seeking to better understand with the launch of the 2025 COLOSS Survey. Dr Michael Holmes, Project Manager, Honey Bee and Pollination Industry National Colony Loss Survey at Australian National University (ANU) said participation in the survey was voluntary but critical for building an accurate industry snapshot.

"By building an informed and accurate dataset, we prompt industry and government action to safeguard not only the honey bee industry, but other agricultural industries that are reliant on the Australian honey bee population for pollination," he said.

Two thirds of agricultural goods require honey bee pollination, with 35 industries, which include Australian favourites such as avocados and cherries, depending wholly on pollination to produce fruits and nuts.

The survey revealed a national annual colony loss rate of 1.55%, highlighting the vulnerability of Australia's honey bee population. Unsurprisingly, Varroa was identified as a leading cause of colony loss, placing significant economic burdens on beekeepers through reduced honey production, additional labour and increased hive management costs. The survey has revealed the breadth of resources required to protect hives and support research, as well as integrate pest management strategies and proactive practices to ensure productive and healthy colonies.

Positive participation needed

The industry peak body is calling on beekeepers to participate in the 2025 survey to help generate the data needed to shape policy and resourcing for local honey production and hive management.

"Colony loss doesn't only impact honey production or key agricultural sectors, it is also threatening the livelihood of beekeepers," said Danny Le Feuvre, CEO Australian Honey Bee Industry Council (AHBIC).

"They are hit with the cost to replace hives or invest in preventative measures, as well as the loss of income that comes with the collapse of a colony.

"By investing in research and understanding the national state of play, we can protect our honey bees and build our resilience as an industry."

The COLOSS survey is funded through the National Varroa Transition to Management Program and administered collaboratively with the support of ANU, AHBIC, and AgriFutures Australia. Australia's beekeepers are urged to complete the Australian Colony Loss Survey as part of a national effort to understand the impact of the Varroa outbreak and improve hive health management.

CRYSTECH ADDS IBC BARREL WARMER

By John Kennedy

NZ based equipment group Crystech has announced the introduction of a heated agitator and warmer designed to suit a full IBC, or a pallet of barrels of honey .

It is designed to accelerate honey liquefaction while avoiding unnecessary heat exposure, and employs single phase power, has a compact design to save space and is designed to cut hot room times, with a variable speed control to ensure precision mixing.

Further product information is available from the crystech website.

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For more information contact:

The Editor, PO Box 7425,

SUTTON NSW 2620

Ph: 0427 552 001

honeybeenews@bigpond.com

Contacts

VAA Resources Management Comm.
Chairman: Ken Gell,
Mob: 0428 506 752
gellshoneymaryborough @gmail.com
Secretary:
Angela Enbom
0400 261 233
angela_enbom@yahoo.com

Regional Managers
Central region:
Millie Enbom-Goad
Ph: 0400 083 582
millie_enbomgoad @yahoo.com.au

North East region:
Andrew McCallum
Mob: 0448 577 780
rawhoneyvic@gmail.com

Sunraysia region:
Ron Robinson,
Ph: 03 5024 1068
honeybee711@bigpond.com

Port Phillip region:
Ashley Smith
Mob: 0419 155 857
lakesidehoney@outlook.com

Gippsland region:
Ian Cane, Mob: 0428 516 325
iancane@bigpond.com.au

Western region:
Daryl Hobbs
0427 340 197

Agriculture Victoria:
Agriculture Victoria: Apiary team
Website: Honey bees | Livestock and animals | Agriculture Victoria
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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

Current Apiary Officers
Nikki Jones
Biosecurity Manager Apiary
1 Taylor Street, Epsom,
Victoria, Australia 3551
Mob: 0428 617 071
Email: honeybee.biosecurity @agriculture.vic.gov.au

Karla Williams
Biosecurity Officer Apiary
1 McKoy Street, Wodonga,
Victoria, 3690
Mob: 0417 121 987
Email: honeybee.biosecurity @agriculture.vic.gov.au

Adam Maxwell,
Biosecurity Officer Apiary
475-485 Mickleham Road,
Attwood, Victoria, 3049
Mob: 0428 893 595
Email: honeybee.biosecurity @agriculture.vic.gov.au

Karyn Di Florio
Bee Biosecurity Officer
Email: honeybee.biosecurity @agriculture.vic.gov.au

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

DEECA Regional contacts for bee sites on Crown land
Barwon South West
Geelong, Otway District –
Linda Laurie, Ph: 0408 419 759, E:
linda.laurie@deeca.vic.gov.au

Heywood, Far South West –
Troy Jenkin, Ph: 0459 807 401, E:
troy.jenkin@deeca.vic.gov.au

Gippsland
Tracey West – Ph:0457 501 299,
tracey.west@deeca.vic.gov.au,
traral-gon.propertyservices@deeca.vic.gov.au

Grampians
Ballarat – Jennifer Bromley,
Ph: 0448 389 270,
E: publicland.grampians @deeca.vic.gov.au

Horsham – Jess Dickerson, Ph: 0437 913 538,
E: publicland.grampians @deeca.vic.gov.au

Hume
E: landadmin.hume @deeca.vic.gov.au
Wodonga: Lloyd Beaty is contact

Loddon Mallee
Justin Hoy (primary contact) –
Ph:0459 336 836
Daniel Cadmore (secondary contact) – Ph: 0418 715 831

Port Phillip (Note: enquiries dealt with by Gippsland Region)
Tracey West – Ph:0457 501 299 E:
tracey.west @deeca.vic.gov.au,
traralgon.propertyservices @deeca.vic.gov.au

Customer Contact Centre
(Ballarat based)
Ph: 136 186
E: customer.service @deeca.vic.gov.au

Statewide Transaction Centre
(Seymour based)
Ph: (03) 7019 2577
E: transactioncentre @deeca.vic.gov.au

Other contacts
Australian Honey Bee Industry Council (AHBIC):
CEO: Danny Le Feuvre
Mob: 0402 467 780
ahbic@honeybee.org.au
5 John St.
Ardrossan, SA, 5571
www.honeybee.org.au

Crop Pollination Association Inc
President: Steve Fuller,
president.cpaa.aus@gmail.com
Ph 0488 434 498
Secretary: Janet Clyde
jclyde.cpaa@gmail.com
Ph 0417 494 867

Honey Bee Research & Development committee (HBRDC)
Annie Stoddart
Program Coordinator Research
02 69236918
Annie.stoddart@agrifutures.com.au

VFF State Beekeeping Branch:
Secretary: Gail Rochelmeyer
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

Contacts

VAA Inc Regional Groups

Bendigo Branch:
Secretary: Peta Dawe
bbvaasecretary@gmail.com
Chair: Jamie Trimby
bbvaachair@gmail.com
Treasurer: Michael St.Clair
bbvaatreasurer@gmail.com
General Information Q&A
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vaamelbournesection@hotmail.com
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Information/ Education Meetings: from 7:30 pm the last Thursday of each month except December
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1 The Avenue, Surry Hills.

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

VAA Inc. Library Trust
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Ph 03 9735 3836

Affiliated Organisations

Central Victorian Apiarists' Association Inc (CVAA Inc.):
Millie Enbom-Goad
Ph: 0400 083 582
cvaa_inc@outlook.com

Gippsland Apiarists' Association Inc. (GAA Inc.):
President: Stan Glowacki:
jeeralangapiary@bigpond.com
0413 136 878
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
Phone: 0400 667 125 (Secretary)
Postal Address: PO Box 87., 84 Bulla Rd., Bulla, VIC 3428

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

If any contact details or information on these pages is incorrect please advise the editor at abjeditors@yahoo.com

CLASSIFIEDS

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Dingley,
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Contact: Stuart Archibald
Email: rosalie@archibaldhoney.com.au

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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
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Carrum Downs
Vic 3201
Ph: 0438 7465 01
Contact Moe Jarrad
majarrad@gmail.com
Beemanhoney.com.au

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Capilano Honey Ltd
Capilano St.
Maryborough,
VIC 3465
Ph: 07 3712 8224
0419 431 652
Contact: Stephen Covey

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Goode's Honey
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Bairnsdale,
VIC 3875
Ph: 03 5152 2180
Contact: Terry Goode

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Honey Buyers Group
Martin Drake,
Bendigo or
Melbourne
0409 808 332

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Redpath's Beekeeping Supplies
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Parkdale,
VIC 3195
Ph: 03 9587 5950
Alan Redpath
redpaths@redpaths.com.au
www.redpaths.com.au

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NEW MEMBERS

Faye Partridge
Kevin Prime
William Scott

The deadline for the November 2025 ABJ is 10pm on Saturday 1st of November

Do you have photos of bee or honey related subjects? The Australian Bee Journal would love your photos for use in the journal and/or on the VAA website. Please send to abjeditors@yahoo.com

John van Weeghel

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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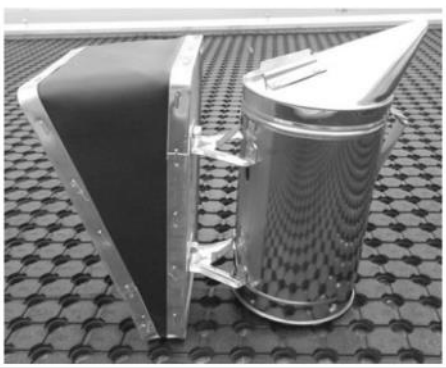

2025 Melbourne Royal Show

The VAA Melbourne Show organising committee wishes to thank the over 80 volunteers who attended the VAA's booth at this year's show. Not only did we meet thousands of visitors to the booth and shared our love of honeybees, we sold hundreds of kilos of some of the best honey in Victoria. We also want to thank our product sponsors who donated honey to our event. You can contact these businesses throughout the year if you'd like to purchase more amazing honey!

Event Chairs: Richard Collins, Lindsay Callaway
Show Managers: Judy Leggett, Mike Love
Volunteer Coordinator: Peta Dawe
Education Program & Live Bee Coordinator: Tony Wilsmore

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