

AUSTRALIAN BEE JOURNAL

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Beekeeping Smarts - page 12 Varroa Viewpoint - page 14 Yellow-legged Hornet - page 23 Varroa Pyrethroid Resistance in Victoria - page 26



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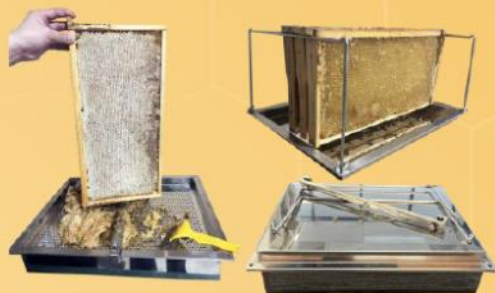
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AUSTRALIAN BEE JOURNAL

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President's Report	5
Bags Of Dead Bees	6
Bee Bits	7/13/32
Australian Colony Loss Survey	8
World Bee Day Child Care Centre Presentation	9
Varroa Spread Map	10
Book: A Guide to the Safe Removal of Honey Bee Colonies from Buildings	10
Bendigo Branch Report	11
Beekeeper Smarts	12
Varroa Viewpoint	14
Recent Web/Podcasts	16
Varroa Resistance	21
Yellow-legged Hornet	23
Varroa Pyrethroid Resistance In Victoria	26
Season Report	28
Honey The Healer	31
Bendigo Branch: Make & Mend Day	33
AHBIC Updates	34
Contacts	36/37
Classifieds / Members / Index of Advertisers	38

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Statements expressed by contributors do not necessarily reflect the views of the VAA Inc or the editor.
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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 2026 - 2027 Board

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

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- The VAA's monthly magazine *Australian Bee Journal* - electronic version - plus one free classified ad per year
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- 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 Victoria's beekeepers.
It's your industry.
It's your VAA.
And VAA is your collective voice and peak body.

Beekeepers want the same things...

- We want healthy bees.
- We want viable businesses.
- We want practical solutions.
- We want to win the fight against varroa.
- We want a future worth handing to the next generation.



However, for too long, parts of our industry have been distracted by division and fragmented thinking. Having and sharing different points of view is essential, and it is necessary that we each bring our views to the table. The future we build to adapt to the paradigm shift of varroa will succeed only if we build that future together.

After more than twelve months in this role, I have enormous respect for every VAA president who has come before me. Your Victorian Apiarists' Association is relatively small in structure, yet massive in importance to agriculture, food security and the future of apiculture in this state. And yet, despite the challenges, I have never been more optimistic.

Adversity has a way of revealing what matters. Varroa has now established itself across Victoria. Fuel costs, seasonal pressure, increasing operating costs and regulatory complexity continue to test commercial and recreational beekeepers alike. The emergence of resistant mite strains only sharpens that challenge further. But I believe this challenge will ultimately make us stronger.

Varroa is forcing us to evolve. It is forcing us to collaborate. It is forcing us toward smarter, safer and more sustainable management systems. And in many ways, this transition will strengthen Victoria's beekeeping for generations to come.

VAA exists to ensure that the transition ahead happens with Victoria's beekeepers at the centre of every decision. By putting beekeepers first, VAA provides a home for all Victoria's beekeepers. By putting beekeepers first, VAA provides a voice for all Victoria's beekeepers. This has been a year of delivery, progress and strategic momentum for Victoria's beekeeping.

Over the past twelve months, your VAA has delivered practical outcomes across education, advocacy, research, industry support and association growth. Thanks to a lot of work by a lot of people, here are some key results/highlights...

Strategic direction and renewal

- Established the framework for the VAA Strategic Plan.
- Formal articulation of VAA principles of *One Home. One Voice. One Guardian*.
- Clearer alignment of advocacy, education and member service priorities.

Biosecurity and education

- Delivery of the Advanced Commercial Varroa Workshop at Swanpool.
- Delivery of the Specialist Varroa Workshop at Cairnlea.
- Continued growth of HiveMeet as Victoria's monthly digital learning platform.
- Expansion of the VAA's online education and recorded resource library.

Industry capability and support

- Launch of the Apiary Business Navigator Program.
- Development of the Peer-to-Peer Beekeeper Support framework.
- Practical support for Victorian beekeepers navigating varroa transition.

Advocacy and policy

- Initiated and led the landmark DEECA Strategic Roadmap Workshop.
- Progress through the Ag-Chem Working Group toward practical treatment reform.
- Continued advocacy on public land access, prescribed burning and beekeeper service fees.
- Stronger representation of honey bee food security issues to government and agriculture.

Research and Long-term stewardship

- Progression of the Box Ironbark Forest research grant.
- Strengthening of the Resources subcommittee.
- Development of practical long-term floral resource stewardship pathways.

Community and association strength

- Record momentum leading into the 2026 Annual Conference.
- Strong sponsorship support and growing industry backing.
- Outstanding Melbourne Royal Show volunteer contribution.
- Continued branch engagement and regional leadership growth.

These are not isolated activities. They are strategic building blocks. Together, they represent a VAA with purpose and momentum.

One home. VAA continues to strengthen its role as the home for all Victoria's beekeepers.

Across branches, workshops, digital education and volunteer programs, we are seeing stronger engagement from recreational, sideline and commercial beekeepers alike.

Importantly, we are seeing younger beekeepers stepping forward. This matters. Because the long-term strength of our association depends on renewal.

(Continued on page 6)

President's Report, cont'd

(Continued from page 5)

One Voice. VAA has worked hard over the past twelve months to ensure Victoria's beekeepers are heard clearly and credibly. Government is listening. Agriculture is listening. Policy makers are listening. That has only been possible because our advocacy is increasingly united, evidence-based and solutions-focused.

One Guardian. Varroa remains the defining challenge of our generation. VAA will continue fighting to ensure Victoria's beekeepers have access to treatment pathways that are legal, practical, safe and effective. We must move quickly toward a future where every Victorian beekeeper, regardless of scale, has confidence in the treatment options available to them.

This work is well underway and will remain one of VAA's highest priorities.

A stake in the ground

The next twelve months must be a year of renewal. My hope is that we continue to see younger leaders step forward, ready to serve, support and shape the beekeeping industry via VAA. My expectation is that Victoria's beekeepers continue to unite around practical, evidence-based varroa management. My commitment is that VAA will continue pushing for the systems, education and regulatory settings required for our industry to thrive.

I remain incredibly proud to serve as VAA president. Thank you to every board member, volunteer, sponsor, branch representative and member who has contributed to this year's progress. Together, we will continue to build something stronger.

Kind regards,
Lindsay Callaway
President
Victorian Apiarists' Association Inc.

Bags Of Dead Bees

By Kris Fricke

In the official training we provided we were told to tell beekeepers after an alcohol wash to securely bag the dead bees and dispose of them into the waste management system. The legal basis for this is presumably one or both of the following:

The Australian Honey Bee Industry Code of Practice §7.1 – *A beekeeper must not allow a used hive, part of a used hive (including frames, combs, honey or beeswax) or an appliance containing honey to be exposed in a manner or under conditions likely to attract robber bees; including during transportation.*¹

The **Livestock Disease Control Act of 1994**² also has some related provisions:

§ 52 Exposure of bees to infected articles etc.

A person must not expose—

any hive infected with disease; or

any beeswax, fittings or other articles which are infected with disease or have been taken from or used in conjunction with any hive infected with disease—in any manner that will allow access by bees to the hive or articles unless the hive or articles have been disinfected.

A person must not expose or extract any honey which is infected with disease in any manner which will allow access to the honey by bees.

A person must not expose any pollen collected from bees, which is infected with disease, in any manner that will allow bees to access the pollen. A beekeeper must take all reasonable precautions to ensure that any honey, honeycomb, fittings or other article on or in which honey is deposited and which is in the person's possession or under the person's control does not remain exposed in such a manner or under such conditions that would provide bees with access to the honey.

The **Livestock and Disease Control Act of 2017**³ provides additional legal requirements for beekeepers but doesn't touch on this question.

These are very good reasonable regulations everyone should adhere to in order to prevent the spread of disease. They are often paraphrased as "do not leave any hive material exposed," which is generally close enough, but an astute reader may note that dead bees soaked in alcohol are neither likely to attract robber bees, nor are they infected with disease.

Consider that 1200-2400 bees are born in a hive every day during the season, and therefore 1200-2400 bees are also dying every day. Compared to this normal background delivery of dead bees into the environment by every single active hive, the addition of 300 dead bees is not significant. Yes, it's one ~30g clump, which is similar to a dead mouse, which, incidentally, is also a naturally occurring thing of little impact.

A thin film of alcohol will evaporate in less than an hour, and alcohol is a naturally occurring substance that definitely does not have any long-lasting toxic consequences for the environment. Dumping out the remaining alcohol could kill the grass it's dumped on, but if dumped into bare dirt should have no discernable negative consequences.

And so, if, after doing an alcohol wash you make a small depression in the dirt with your heel, dispose of the dead bees into it, and cover it again, there would be no environmental or legal hazard.

Obviously, there's nothing wrong with collecting all your dead bees in a bag to throw in your trash at home, but on the ecological balance that does introduce non-biodegradable plastic into the waste system and the dead bees are also now taking up space in the waste system rather than quickly decomposing in the natural environment. Plus, you're driving around with a you-

(Continued on page 7)

Bags Of Dead Bees, cont'd

(Continued from page 6)

hope-not-leaking bag of multiple hives' worth of dead alcohol soaked bees in your car.

Every step that makes proper varroa management more tedious makes people less likely to perfectly conduct the ideal implementation of Best Management Practices in the ways that actually matter. I'd rather a commercial beekeeper successfully check his 10 hives each in four apiaries than think to himself "ah I'm under the pump and don't want to have 40 hives worth of dead bees in a bag steaming in the cab with me all day, she'll be right."

¹ Plant Health Australia (2025) *Australian Honey Bee Industry Biosecurity Code of Practice (Version 2.1)*. Canberra: Plant Health Australia.

² *Livestock Disease Control Act 1994* (Vic). <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/livestock-disease-control-act-1994>

³ *Livestock Disease Control Regulations 2017* (Vic). <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/statutory-rules/livestock-disease-control-regulations-2017>

Thousands of beekeepers submit honey to benefit environmental science in the UK

National Honey Monitoring Scheme provides a massive archive of bee-derived data

PLOS

Beekeepers and their honeybees can be invaluable participants in environmental surveys, according to a study published May 20, 2026 in the open-access journal *PLOS One* by Jennifer Shelton of the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology and colleagues.

Honeybees can be extremely useful collectors of environmental data, since they gather plant materials from a wide area and amass it in a convenient central location. However, traditional methods of collecting these data are costly and time-consuming and have only been successful at relatively small scales.

In this study, Shelton and colleagues present the results of the UK National Honey Monitoring Scheme (NHMS), which enlisted the volunteer assistance of over 3,500 beekeepers across England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland between 2018 and 2025. These citizen scientists submitted 5,789 samples of honey from their hives, and researchers extracted DNA from pollen grains within the honey to identify which plants the bees were visiting. These analyses identified over 800 species of plants utilized by honeybees and pinpointed the most commonly visited species, including cultivated canola, clovers, and invasive Himalayan balsam.

Read the full article [here](#)



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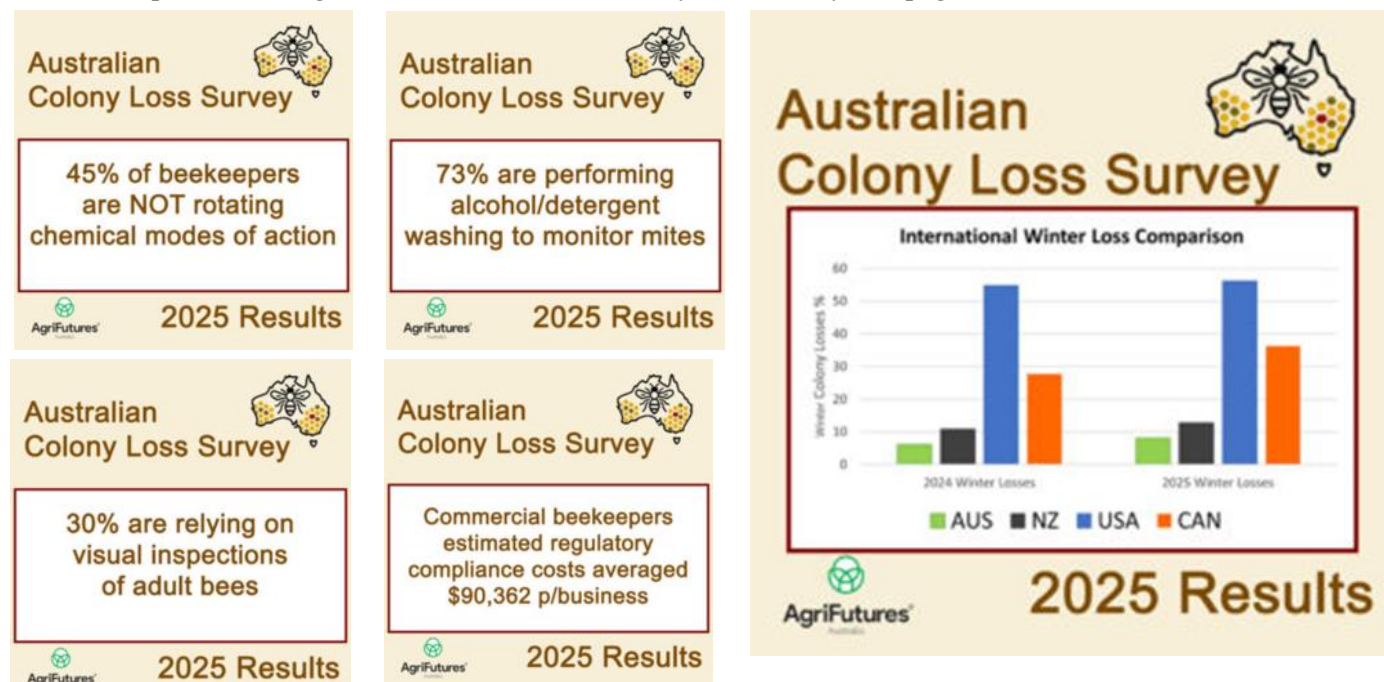
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Australian Colony Loss Survey

AHBIC is still urging Australian beekeepers to commit to the Australian Colony Loss Survey in 2026 to make sure all the important industry matters are captured and recorded now and into the future.

Some important findings from 2025 Australian Colony Loss Survey: see page 35 for more details



AHBIC will be playing a key role in taking the Australian Colony Loss Survey forward in 2026. We are looking forward to implementing a steering committee and taking feedback to address industry concerns, new ideas or questions to be added and any changes industry stakeholders may have moving forward. Please reach out to bianca@honeybee.org.au for questions you may have.

Save the Date!!
Bendigo Branch VAA
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World Bee Day May 20th

By Jo Griffiths

Have you ever explained bees to a bunch of 3 - 5 year olds?

I was recently given the opportunity to do a bee incursion at a childcare centre. Bearing in mind their little brains have a short attention span and that they learn through play, I structured my presentation to last for around 20 minutes, and to include as much 'hands-on' experience as possible.

I started with the body parts, highlighting a tongue that's like a straw for drinking nectar, an extra stomach for nectar, and pollen baskets on the back legs, then we all wiggled our antennae and practiced pushing the pretend pollen down into our pretend pollen baskets.

Then I explained the life cycle and 3 classes, and played a video of bees hatching from the wax. After showing them a (spotlessly clean) smoker, and opening it to see the inside, I puffed some air into each face, and then moved onto the parts of a hive, a hive tool to separate pretend stuck boxes, a frame, some pieces of comb that went from white to cream to brown to black, and some wax that I had melted from the comb.

They loved being able to hold the comb and wax, were surprisingly gentle, and returned all the pieces. I showed them a bee brush and brushed their hands with it, and then a queen clip which I used on my finger - the kids were very focused on what I was doing to my finger!

We moved onto honey and I had two jars of very different coloured honey and some honeycomb to taste using popsicle sticks (note to self, take wet wipes in future), and explained how honey changes according to what the bees have been eating.

I talked about how important bees are and how poisons can hurt them, and then put on my bee suit. I had a couple of hats with veils that they loved trying on, with their teachers taking lots of photos for the parents. I finished up talking about how bees talk to each other through smells and dances, and we all did a waggle dance across the room flapping our wings and wiggling our bodies, then looking at the bees in the observational hive before leaving the room.

All in all it was a great experience, including "where is the King?", only one kiddo saying he'd been stung one time, and another who kept coming back to touch all the stuff he could.



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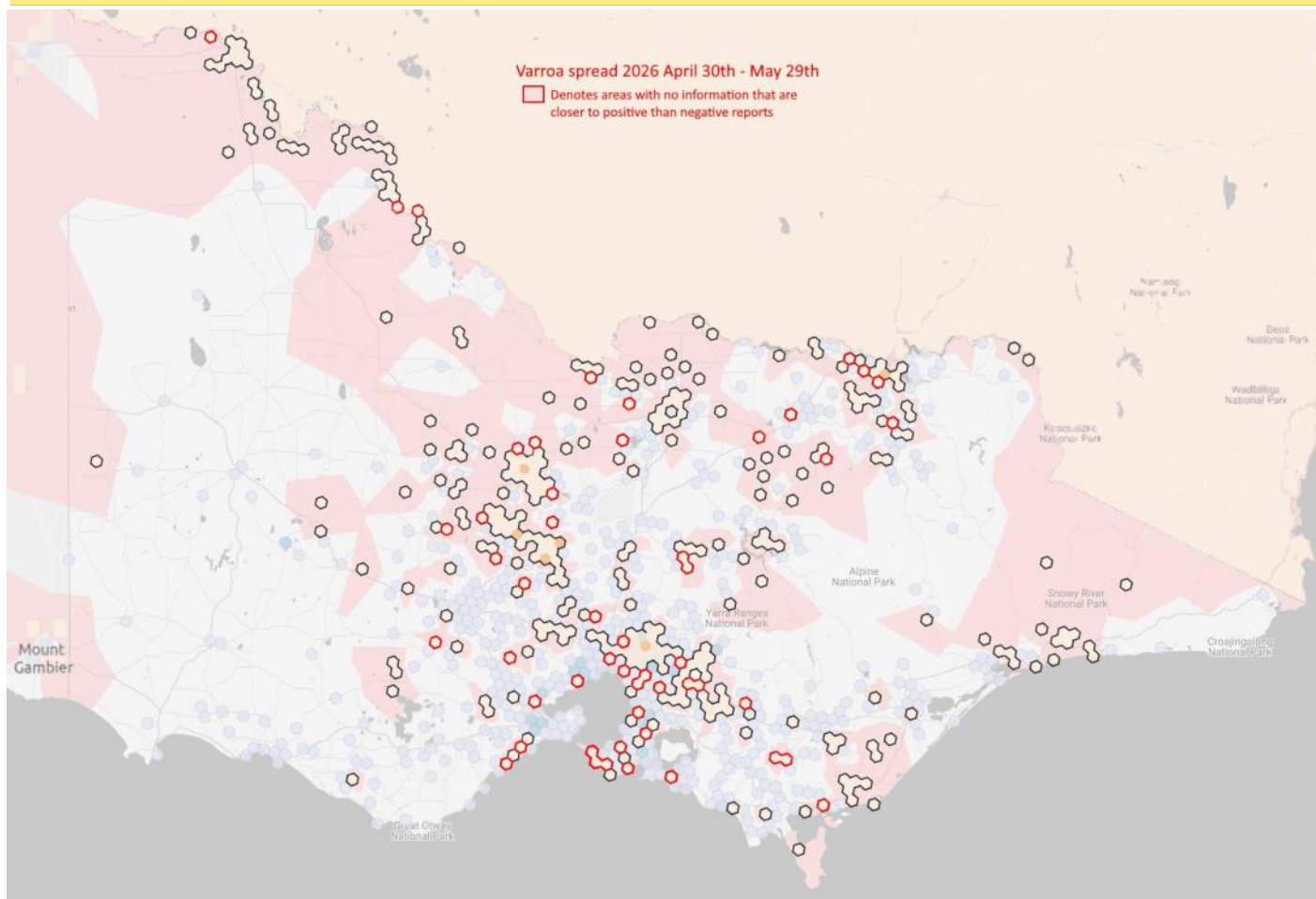
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Varroa Spread Map as at May 29 2026



Every time I post a varroa spread map, a few pessimists start declaring "its pointless because it's everywhere." Inevitably those people turn out to already have varroa and from their perspective it really is going to be anywhere they go, but try for a moment to look at things from shoes other than your own. Varroa does not teleport, it only goes where beekeepers take it, which is not yet everywhere. In my area (Geelong) the hexes match exactly what is known. If you are in Hamilton and finding no mites in your wash you can breath a sigh of relief that its probably still far away. Whereas, based on this map, if you're doing a wash in Bendigo and finding nothing, its worth making sure you're doing the wash right. Yes probably not every positive area is indicated on the map, but every blue hex is a genuine negative report from the last four months and only when there's nearly none of those will it be reasonable to say that Varroa is everywhere.

Kris Fricke

New Book Release

By John Kennedy

A Guide to the Safe Removal of Honey Bee Colonies from Buildings

Beekeepers at all levels frequently receive requests from their local community. Removal of swarms from a front or back yard are usually common. Even more challenging is to extract a hive from within a wall or building cavity which is frequently difficult, risky and time consuming. This makes the release of this first edition paperback from www.northernbeebooks.co.uk very timely. It's a 130 page, multiple chapter, paperback written by Clive Stewart and Stuart Roberts. One of the authors, Mr Stewart, is a founder of UK Bee Removals (UKBR).

It has many case study examples executing such work – and is superbly detailed and richly illustrated.

The book is also richly endorsed by no less than Dr Tom Seeley who notes “that many removals properly performed can foster the survival of colonies which have survived without help from us, and show they have the skills needed to cope with parasites and pathogens. Thus they can help us find our way back to treatment-free beekeeping”.

Included in the book are warnings about safety which he recommends should be included in any beekeeping course.

A chapter is devoted for beekeepers who may be considering this service as a small business.

Included are issues like insurance or if asbestos is encountered in a building structure and other legal issues.

This book, which is said to protect and preserve the colony itself, is advertised at 19 pounds Sterling and is surely a good reference for beekeepers and Club or Society libraries.

Bendigo Branch Report

Bendigo Branch now proudly has three varroa specialists that are dedicated to educating our members and to pass on vital information to our club. VAA kindly hosted another varroa specialist workshop at the Croquet Centre in Cairnlea in early May, which we all attended. The focus was on recreational and hobbyist beekeepers which fits right in with the majority of our demographic.

We were reminded how to properly show our members to do an alcohol wash (or soapy water wash) by Tony Wilsmore. Ashton Edgely from Ag Vic Apiary team talked to us on the state Victoria is in at the moment with varroa mite and how important our vigilance must be to manage and control the situation. Controlling the spread of disease and pests between hives and different apiaries is critical so cleanliness and hygiene of tools & PPE is a priority.

Andrew Wootton went through the different miticides we now have available for use in Victoria. The mite resistance being shown in Queensland and northern NSW shows we must be on top of each miticide (either synthetic or organic) and understand when and how to use them to prevent resistance in Victoria. We then had a practical scenario outside watching each treatment being placed into the live hives.



We had scenarios presented to us where, as a group we discussed how we could treat the hive at different times of the year, which I found really helpful. We all retain different information so to hear it discussed in a working group helped bring to mind other aspects and options we may not have thought about.

Paul McCrory gave us a very interesting presentation on anaphylaxis, teaching us what signs to look for and how to respond to the situation. EpiPens of course are a must have in the beekeeper's toolkit, I cannot stress this enough.

I would like to thank the VAA for running this workshop to help further educate each of us. The more information we get and pass on, the better chance we have of managing through this tough first stage of the mites in our state. I look forward to more of these types of educational days where we gather together to try and conquer our situation.

Alex Perera from the Ag Vic Chemical Team presented to us as our guest speaker at our May meeting. She spoke about different chemical treatments to use in our hives to treat Varroa. The right and wrongs of chemical use, the regulatory framework and who to contact. This was the first presentation from the chemical team and Alex wants us to contact their team if we have any queries (chemical_standards@agriculture.vic.gov.au). They will be working closely with the VAA to create an industry plan.

Check out www.apvma.gov.au for any further information. We have invited Alex back to our annual Field Day so it will be interesting to see how the industry plan is working.

Angelique Perry

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Beekeeper Smarts

By Simon Chatburn

Above all beekeeper intelligence lives where humility and curiosity meet.

Henry David Thoreau once lamented how hard it is for human groups to achieve true collective intelligence: "The mass never comes up to the standard of its best member, but on the contrary degrades itself to a level with the lowest." Likewise, Friedrich Nietzsche claimed that "Madness is the exception in individuals but the rule in groups."

Human collectives can indeed make bad decisions, yet they can also make exceptionally good ones. The question for us as beekeepers is: under what conditions can a community of beekeepers act with high intelligence, making wise, timely decisions that genuinely serve the bees' needs?

Honey bee nest-site selection offers a template. By translating the swarm's decision habits into human practice, beekeeper groups can become more like a well-functioning superorganism and less like the disorganized crowds Thoreau and Nietzsche criticized.

The first relevant factor is how beekeeper communities are organized with respect to knowledge. In an "intelligent apiary culture," decisions are not dominated by one or two charismatic voices, nor by a narrow orthodoxy. Instead, information-gathering and hypothesis generation are broadly diffused among many beekeepers, each acting as a "scout" in different landscapes, climates and management styles. Each beekeeper inde-

pendently explores options - treatment protocols, forage strategies, hive designs, breeding lines, alternative or low-chemical approaches - and brings those findings back to the group. Just as scout bees freely report every possible nest site via the waggle dance, an intelligent beekeeper community creates spaces where good, mediocre and even failed experiments can be shared without ridicule or suppression. The larger and more diverse this pool of field experience, the more likely it is that truly excellent, bee-centric practices will emerge.

A second key feature of "beekeeper intelligence" is the cultivation of independence of judgment rather than conformity. In the swarm, a newly recruited scout does not simply echo the dance she followed; she inspects the site herself and only dances if her own evaluation confirms its quality. Beekeeper communities can mirror this by encouraging practitioners to test popular ideas in their own apiaries, with careful observation and records, rather than adopting fads, marketing claims or "guru" prescriptions uncritically. When a respected beekeeper reports success with a method - say a new natural varroa strategy, a biocontrol, or a novel cultural practice - the intelligent response from others is not blind adoption but thoughtful trial: "I will try this, measure its impact on my bees, and then report back honestly." This independence of opinion prevents error cascades and "mass manias" over poor interventions that may harm bees or waste resources.

The third crucial ingredient is how beekeeper com-

(Continued on page 13)



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Beekeeper Smarts, cont'd

(Continued from page 12)

munities aggregate these many, independent observations. Swarms use a quorum: only when enough scouts have independently validated a site does the swarm commit to it. In beekeeper terms, this means resisting both impulsive adoption of new practices based on one enthusiastic anecdote and the opposite error of paralysis. Instead, groups can set informal "quorum criteria": for example, a protocol only becomes a recommended practice when it has worked under several different conditions, from multiple keepers, with consistent positive outcomes for colony health and survival. This takes time - seasons rather than weeks - but it ensures that diversity of experience has had space to surface and be weighed. The "quorum" approach balances the need for timely decisions (we cannot wait forever when colonies are under pressure) with the need to avoid premature consensus built on thin evidence.

Seen this way, the study of honey-bee group decision making becomes a mirror for human practice in the apiary. To cultivate genuine "beekeeper intelligence," groups can adopt three hive-inspired habits:

1. Structure discussions as open competitions of ideas rather than battles of ego, where unconventional observations are welcomed and tested rather than dismissed.

2. Actively promote diversity of knowledge and independence of opinion - different climates, hive types, forage strategies, treatment philosophies, and scales of operation all have something valuable to add.

3. Aggregate experience using transparent, quorum-like thresholds that respect both time constraints and the breadth of field knowledge, so that the practices we converge on are robust, repeatable, and most importantly, aligned with the bees' own wellbeing.

"I'm just one more bee of the larger swarm and together we can make the best decision"

Chameleon' bees change color with the weather

Queen Mary University of London

Some bees really do change colour with the weather, according to new research that shows humidity can temporarily alter the shimmering hues of certain species. In a study published in *Biology Letters*, scientists led by Dr Madeleine Ostwald of Queen Mary University of London found that moisture in the air can cause sweat bees to change colour - and then change back again when conditions dry out. Sweat bees are known for their bright, metallic greens and blues. Until now, reports that their colours could shift have been anecdotal. This new research provides the first experimental proof. Read the full article [here](#)

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Varroa Viewpoint

By Andrew Wootton

Last month I attended two compelling meetings: the NSW Apiarists' Association Conference and a webinar hosted by the Sustainable Beekeepers Guild of Michigan. The creativity being applied to the varroa problem is inspiring. I'll share some highlights.

Mount Panorama Lookout

Sam Ramsey (yes, he of fat body fame – Dr Ramsey first described how varroa feeds on this tissue rather than haemolymph¹) was there to discuss his research on the mite. He is attempting to overcome two problems, a recent broken leg and the longer impact of Trump's capricious cut to his funding. Despite these hurdles, he captivated the audience with his description of Kleptocytosis – certainly a new term for me. Calculating the energy requirements for the mite to produce eggs every 30 hours, shows that rather than digest honey bee proteins to re-synthesize yolk proteins, the mite accelerates the process by transferring the vitellogenin directly into the eggs.² Of course, this suggests there could be many novel interventions to obstruct mite reproduction. These will surely follow, a thrilling prospect.

Professor Ramsay also detailed the emerging threat of *Tropilaelaps*. Worryingly, this more damaging parasite is advancing on three fronts; into Eastern Europe as well as Central and South Asia.³ Perhaps a little more encouraging are the findings that formic acid and thermal treatments can be effective in controlling this new pest.⁴ Let's try to keep Australia *Tropilaelaps* free!

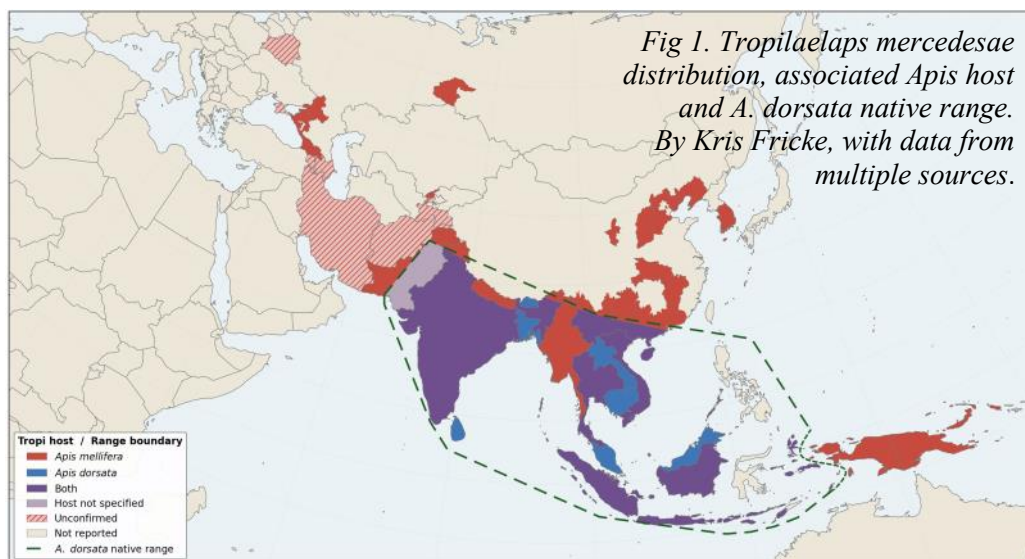


Fig 1. *Tropilaelaps mercedesae* distribution, associated *Apis* host and *A. dorsata* native range.
By Kris Fricke, with data from multiple sources.

Michigan Snapshot

Trevor Bawden of Lloyd St Bees and Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin has devised a new way of estimating mite infestation. The Bawden Assay⁵ measures mites in brood rather than on the adult bees. This overcomes the shortcomings of the existing mite wash which does not count the more relevant reproductive mites under the cappings (we know that as many as 80% of the mites can be in the brood depending on the season). The test utilises a wax depilatory strip to remove cappings from 200 pupated cells, followed by banging the inverted frame on a brick to dislodge the contents (pupae plus mites). This harvest is then washed and assessed in the usual way, potentially providing a more sensitive metric of varroa infestation. It's early days yet and Trevor's paper is still in press; we will need wider experience before we can definitively adopt and interpret the results. However, a potential bonus comes with examining the underside of the wax cappings on the adhesive strip. This provides information about the amount of uncapping/recapping behaviour that the colony has been undertaking, giving insight into possible varroa resistance potential. Perhaps we will be able to add this to the pin, liquid nitrogen, UBO and Harbo tests, all of which provide surrogate measures of varroa resistance and are being applied in our breeding programs. Once again, one to watch and I'll certainly be trying this assay in spring.

Acknowledgement: Thanks to Kris Fricke for his exemplary work producing the figure showing *Tropilaelaps* distribution.

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.

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⁵<https://www.lloydstbees.com/post/bawden-assay>

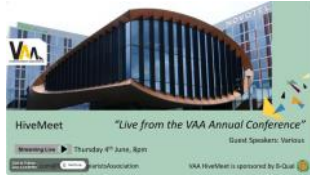
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Varroa Resistance Breeding in Australia

The National Varroa Mite Management Programme how-to videos have been reposted to the VAA youtube channel:

Apivar & Apitraz

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Sustainable Beekeepers of Michigan (SBGMI)

May 10th

Why Varroa Resistance Breeding Can Be So Frustrating w Dr Kirsten Traynor



PODCASTS:

Two Bees in a Podcast

May 27th

Understanding Norroa [the dsRNA Varroa treatment]



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The central collage consists of nine hexagonal images arranged in a circular pattern:

- Top-left: A close-up of a black plastic hive component.
- Top-center: A hand pouring liquid from a small bottle into a container.
- Top-right: A view through a glass pane showing bees inside a hive.
- Middle-left: A person wearing a full protective beekeeping suit and hat, working with a hive.
- Middle-center: A yellow, textured, spherical object next to a white jar.
- Middle-right: A smiling woman standing behind a counter with various beekeeping supplies.
- Bottom-left: A close-up of a mechanical device, possibly a pump or filter.
- Bottom-center: A document titled "APIKAND".
- Bottom-right: An illustration of a beehive on a stand, labeled "BEEKEEPING NOTEBOOK".

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Facebook Roundup, May 2026

By Kris Fricke

This month, particularly in the Commercial Beekeeping Australia group, there are numerous long and serious posts about how something just has to change in government support because the current situation now with chemical resistant mites is unsustainable. Compared to other months it definitely feels like people are reaching a breaking point. Several posts recount life-long stories as multi generational beekeepers before transitioning to dire reports of their recent losses and finally calls for either legalization of more cost effective treatment options or subsidies for the struggling industry. Rather than summarize these posts, which wouldn't do them justice, I will reproduce in full several good posts the authors have given me permission to do so with.

But first, Min Fuller of Bee Services, Grafton NSW, who has been actively advocating on behalf of beekeepers, [has posted a poll she would like beekeepers to answer to help her advocacy efforts](#). (This is not the same survey as the one AHBIC has also recently put out).



Min Fuller, in Commercial Beekeeping Australia, May 21, 22, 25th:

The beekeeping industry is often seen as high risk. But the reality is this: inaction guarantees failure.

What have I got to lose?

Or perhaps the real question is:

What will Australia lose?

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, there were only 1,263 registered commercial beekeeping businesses in Australia as of June 2025.

To put that into perspective, commercial beekeepers account for only around 4% of registered beekeepers in Australia.

Yet that 4% is responsible for an estimated \$14.2 billion in pollination services and approximately 80% of Australia's honey production, according to the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council.

Commercial beekeepers are the backbone of Australia's food security.

We pollinate the crops that feed this country - blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, macadamias, passionfruit, almonds, avocados and countless other industries that depend on healthy, managed honey bees.

But what happens if commercial beekeepers collapse?

What happens when financial pressure, rising input costs, biosecurity threats, bee losses, labour shortages, and the mental toll of carrying enormous responsibility become too much?

Because without commercial beekeepers, there are no pollination services. Without pollination, there is reduced production, higher food prices, lower yields and increasing pressure on Australia's agricultural system.

Now, to answer the question: what do I have to lose?

I was born into beekeeping. I grew up in this industry. I have a deep passion for supporting and speaking up for commercial beekeepers because this is not just a job to me - it is my life.

My parents entered the beekeeping industry before I was born. My father has worked in beekeeping for 47 years, surviving droughts, floods, fires, market pressures, and biosecurity incursions that have challenged our industry time and time again.

Today, our family business employs 10 full-time staff, including my father, who is now semi-retired. Alongside my partner, brother-in-law, and wider family support network, we manage around 5,000 hives, producing honey and pollinating 38 farms across the North Coast, including blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, passionfruit and macadamias.

This is more than a business.

It is livelihoods. It is regional jobs. It is food production. It is food security.

And if commercial beekeepers continue to fall under financial pressure, Australia will lose far more than honey.

Australia risks losing the people who quietly help feed the nation.¹

I do not want to create fear or panic, but I do want commercial beekeepers to be prepared.

From what we have personally experienced in our own operation, I believe synthetic-resistant varroa mites may already be far more widespread across parts of NSW and Queensland than many realise. What I have seen in our own hives has honestly shaken me.

Varroa alone is devastating - but what concerns me most is how quickly colonies can collapse once hives start struggling when treatments are not working. In my personal opinion, based on what we have observed in the field, resistant mites may also be associated with increased viral pressure or secondary health issues within hives. This is my opinion and observation only, and I acknowledge this still needs to be proven through further industry and laboratory research.

What I can say with confidence is this: hive losses can happen fast.

Faster than many of us are prepared for.

I genuinely believe this could shake the commercial beekeeping industry harder than the original varroa incursion if you are not ready for it.

For commercial beekeepers who are yet to experience varroa firsthand - please don't assume time is on your side. Prepare now. Monitor aggressively. Review treatment plans, rotate management strategies, track hive health closely, and have honest conversations about contingency planning.

We cannot afford to be complacent.

A shortage of hives for almond pollination and other critical pollination events is, in my view, a very real possibility if colony losses continue at the scale some of us are already seeing.

This is not fear-mongering. This is a beekeeper speaking openly about what we are seeing, because I don't want others caught unprepared.

(Continued on page 17)

Facebook Roundup, May 2026, cont'd

(Continued from page 16)

Please prepare your business, your bees, and your people.

The commercial beekeeping industry is under pressure - and we need to support one another through what may be ahead.²

One of my biggest fears for the Australian beekeeping industry is not just losing bees - it's losing the people.

Some of the older commercial beekeepers in our industry carry decades of knowledge, experience and practical skills that cannot be learned from a textbook, a Facebook group or a quick online search.

They have lived through droughts, floods, fires, changing seasons, biosecurity threats, market pressures and the constant challenge of keeping bees alive.

They know country, flowering patterns, bee behaviour, honey flows, pollination logistics and how to survive the hard years.

That knowledge matters.

If commercial beekeeping continues to become financially unsustainable, if stress, losses and pressure continue to push people out, we risk losing generations of experience overnight. And once that knowledge disappears, we may never get it back.

At the same time, we desperately need younger people entering this industry.

We need young commercial beekeepers willing to learn, adapt and carry this knowledge forward. But how do we expect the next generation to step in when many are watching businesses struggle, hives die, costs rise and families fight just to survive?

Commercial beekeeping is not just about honey. It is about pollination, food security, agriculture and protecting an industry that quietly supports so much of Australia.

If we don't support commercial beekeepers now - old and young - we risk losing not only an industry, but the experience, resilience and future generations needed to keep it alive.³

Anita Long, founder of Australian Youth Beekeeping, May 28th

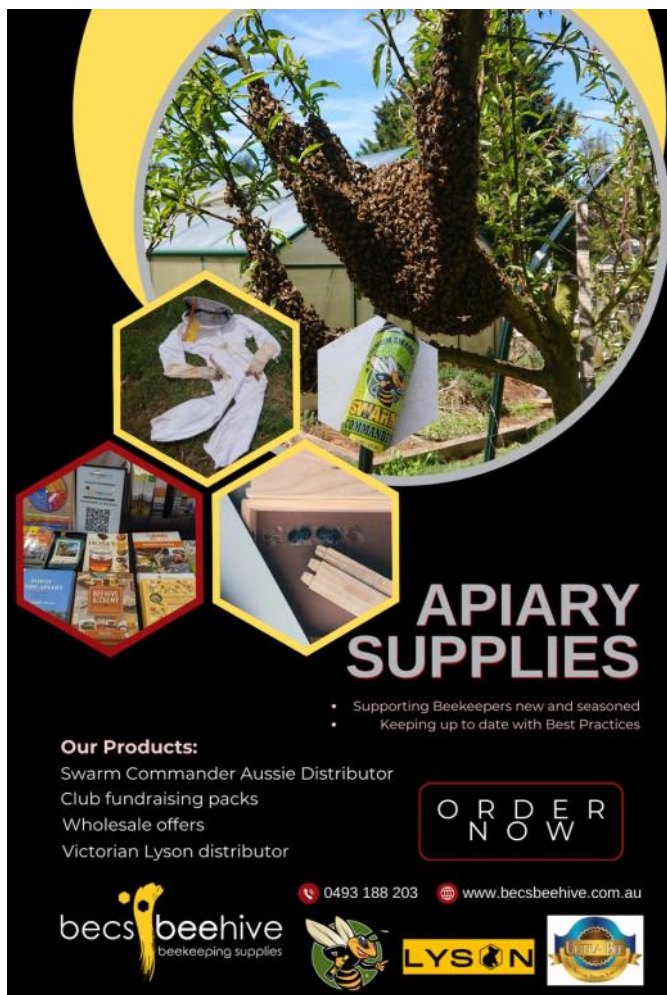
The future of beekeeping is in our hands, let's not drop the ball!

Min has opened up a great discussion on legacy, succession and ultimately the concern for our beekeeping industry future. Discussions that need to happen now and at all levels of our industry.

We need to be careful not to frame the future of beekeeping only through loss.

Yes, we are at a critical point. Australia is facing challenges that have already played out in other parts of the world. Declining beekeeper numbers, financial pressure, pests, diseases, biosecurity threats, low honey

(Continued on page 18)



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Facebook Roundup, May 2026, cont'd

(Continued from page 17)

prices and the loss of experienced people are not issues unique to us. In many ways, this situation was predictable because other countries have already shown us what happens when an industry waits too long to invest in the next generation.

But that also means we can learn from them.

Through my Churchill Fellowship, looking at youth development and pathways into beekeeping, one thing became very clear. Many strong youth beekeeping programs around the world were not created because everything was going well. They were created because industries reached crisis point and realised they could not afford to lose their people, their skills or their knowledge.

In some countries, that meant school programs. In others, it meant junior clubs, mentoring pathways, accreditation programs, practical training, or structured ways for young people to connect with experienced beekeepers. The strongest examples were not just about teaching children to like bees. They were about building long-term pathways into the industry.

That is where Australia needs to be far more intentional.

The intergenerational transfer of knowledge is critical. Experienced beekeepers hold practical knowledge that cannot be replaced, we know that. But that knowledge can only be passed on if we create places where younger people can safely access it, ask questions, observe, learn, handle equipment, understand seasons, and be included in real beekeeping conversations.

That does not always require a major national program, although that would and could be world leading. It can start at every level, through clubs, associations, schools, commercial operators, mentors, training providers and industry bodies making young and emerging beekeepers genuinely welcome.

And I do not believe this is all doom and gloom.

Young people entering beekeeping now are not learning in the industry as it was 30 years ago. They are learning in the industry as it is today. They are learning with varroa, biosecurity pressures, changing seasons, financial strain, pollination demands and global uncertainty. This will be their normal. They will adapt, innovate, learn from overseas, build networks, use new tools, and develop skills shaped by the world they are actually inheriting.

Every generation of beekeepers looks back and remembers the “good old days” before certain pests, diseases or pressures arrived. But the next generation will not simply be trying to recreate the past. They will be learning how to keep bees in the conditions we have now, while carrying forward the knowledge of those who came before them.

That is why investing in young people is not a feel-good extra. It is industry protection.

If we make access to knowledge, education, mentoring, accreditation and practical experience easier, we give young people a reason to stay. We also give experienced beekeepers the opportunity to pass on what they know before it is lost.

Australia does not need to start from scratch. Other countries have faced these challenges before us and have built programs in response. We should be learning from them, adapting what works, and investing now, before the loss becomes irreversible.

I know many of you have followed youth work being done in beekeeping and support it wholeheartedly. It's certainly more than seeing kids in bee suits or cute photos of kids beekeeping. There are a good handful of people right here in Australia changing the landscape for young beekeepers and I proudly put my hand up as one of those, but there could be so many more.

I am sure many commercial beekeepers get sick of seeing our posts or stories of the opportunities we are creating for young people, we certainly don't do that for likes or clicks or even fundraising (at the moment) it is in the hope some of you with all the knowledge will one day find a way to give it to a younger beekeeper as your legacy.⁴

And finally, this post in beekeeping Victoria was by far the most liked, commented and shared post this past month in all the groups I looked at:

Corinne Jordan of Bee Lady Apiaries, in Beekeeping Victoria, May 18th

Lessons from a Queensland Beekeeper:

To Melbourne and Victorian beekeepers - please do not underestimate what is coming.

Queensland is now learning the hard way what an active *Varroa* invasion wave looks like, and my concern is that many southern beekeepers still think this will behave like a manageable “normal mite problem.” It may not.

Yes, Victoria has a cooler climate and stronger winter brood breaks than subtropical Queensland. That may slow mite growth for part of the year.

But Melbourne also has:

- High hive density,
- Explosive spring brood expansion,
- High colony interaction through drifting and robbing,
- Large numbers of colonies living within close flight range of each other.

That combination can allow mite numbers to escalate extremely quickly once reinvasion begins.

If I could restart in Queensland knowing what I know now, I would:

-  Monitor drone brood constantly — not just alcohol washes
-  Remove and inspect drone brood regularly during spring build-up
-  Assume brood infestation is higher than alcohol washes suggest
-  Start treatments earlier, not later
-  Alcohol wash again about a week after synthetic treatments go in to confirm they are actually working

(Continued on page 20)



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Facebook Roundup, May 2026, cont'd

(Continued from page 18)

 Avoid overreliance on synthetics before resistance establishes

 Use Formic Pro sparingly and carefully - it can knock colonies around hard

 Preserve survivor genetics before the invasion wave peaks

One of the biggest mistakes I believe Australia is making is assuming overseas management models directly translate to our conditions.

What we appear to be dealing with in Queensland is:

- resistant mites,
- continuous reinvasion,
- rapid brood infestation,
- and virus-driven collapse dynamics.

By the time you start seeing widespread collapse across an area, you are already behind.

I genuinely hope Victoria's cooler winters buy you time.

Use it wisely.

Good luck out there everyone.⁵

¹ Min Fuller in Commercial Beekeeping Australia 2026-05-21 - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/230845533992673/posts/2473594596384411/>

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Varroa Resistance

Management doesn't block natural Varroa resistance - It buys time for it

by Nathan Whitford

The big question: "If the long-term goal is naturally varroa-resistant bees, how does using chemicals fit into that?"

The honest answer is... it doesn't. Not directly. But the bigger picture matters, and in Australia the picture is huge.

Here in Geelong, we've got more than 1000 registered beekeepers, and probably plenty more who never got around to filling out the paperwork. Victoria holds roughly a quarter of the nation's beekeepers and close to 300 commercial operations. Nationally, honeybee farm-gate revenue has climbed from \$279 million in 2019 to \$363 million in 2025, and the pollination industry contributes a staggering \$4.6 billion to Australia's economy every single year. Recreational beekeepers alone add another \$260.2 million through equipment, training, and supply chains.¹

Should we let nature take its course? It's a great question, but keep in mind this isn't just a backyard-beekeeper question. It touches livelihoods, Australia's national food security and sovereignty, regional employment, and the stability of industries that rely on pollination. And that's before we even consider what happens to Australia's feral honey bee population.

For decades, Australia has had enormous feral honey bee populations. Professor of Behaviour Genetics, Ben Oldroyd, researched feral bee density in Wyperfeld National Park and recorded between 50 and 150 colonies per square kilometre,² and Saul Cunningham's 2022 study still found around 69 colonies per square kilometre in fragmented woodlands.³ Anyone who's gone for a walk around Geelong has probably spotted a few tucked into tree hollows, roof spaces and old Telstra pits.

Feral European honey bees bring some benefits, free pollination for growers and gardeners, however they also push native pollinators off flowers and compete heavily for nectar.⁴ Feral hives can also bring pest and disease to managed hives; however, varroa changes that dynamic overnight.

Based on the New Zealand experience, around 90–95% of feral colonies collapse within 2–3 years of varroa establishing. Any collapse in honey bee populations, whether it's a backyard hive, a commercial apiary, or a feral colony, has real consequences. Pollination drops. Food production suffers. Commercial beekeepers can't meet pollination or honey demand. Regional communities feel the strain and our grocery prices go up, while native pollinators may return to flowers they've avoided for years, and a handful of feral bees may survive the varroa wave.

This doesn't instantly produce a varroa-resistant honeybee. I get the concept; it makes logical sense, the survival of the fittest. However, evolution doesn't work that fast, and the idea that the handful of feral colonies that survive must be "evolving resistance" is a comforting story, but the science says otherwise. Surviving

feral colonies are usually just lucky, as they may be isolated, had low mite counts, or sat in a cooler microclimate that slows mite reproduction.⁵

It took until 1963 before the varroa mite was first found on European honeybee in Hong Kong and Singapore.⁶ If we look at New Zealand, and the United States after more than 30 years of varroa, neither country has produced a naturally mite-proof honeybee. Managed colonies still rely on monitoring and intervention to stay alive. The idea that Australia will somehow leapfrog decades of global experience by doing nothing simply doesn't hold up.

People sometimes point to Cuba as proof that bees can "naturally" become varroa-resistant if we just stop treating. But Cuba's story starts with a massive crash. When varroa arrived in the 1990s, the country was in economic crisis and couldn't import miticides,⁷ and both managed and feral European honey bee colonies collapsed heavily.

The bees that survived weren't super bees; they were simply the lucky ones in cooler microclimates or isolated apiaries, showing behavioural traits rather than any proven genetic resistance. Fast-forward three decades, and Cuba now has the world's largest treatment-free, varroa-resistant European honey bee population, with around 220,000 managed colonies, and their resistance isn't genetic immunity; it's behavioural.

These behavioural traits include recapping, mite removal, and low mite fertility, the same traits seen in other naturally evolved resistant populations.⁸

Cuban bees didn't start out resistant, nor did Cuba have a hidden reservoir of resistant bee stock. Some early varroa resistance elsewhere was linked to Africanised bees, but Cuba's bees are European, which means their resistance came from decades of harsh natural selection, not from a naturally resistant bee lineage.

Cuba also didn't get here by doing nothing. After the initial crash, the industry rebuilt through selective breeding, monitoring, and a strict ban on imports, which helped stabilise these traits.⁸ The lesson isn't that doing nothing works. The lesson is that unmanaged collapse comes first, and recovery takes decades.⁹

That brings us back to the heart of the issue, which is managed bees are the only stable reservoir of honey bees we'll have left once varroa sweeps through Victoria. They carry the genetic diversity, the pollination capacity, and the continuity needed to rebuild. If we lose them, we lose the foundation for any future breeding program and we lose a lot more than honey.

Australia has around 855,000 registered managed hives, and until varroa arrived we also had the highest density of feral honey bees anywhere in the world. That combination makes the idea of "rebuilding the industry from survivor stock" almost impossible. You can't replace nearly a million managed hives, plus the pollination services they provide, by collecting a few scattered survivor colonies from tree hollows. The maths just doesn't work and neither does the biology.

Treating and managing your bees through varroa isn't about coddling weak bees. It's about making sure we still have bees, beekeepers, families, jobs, and food

(Continued on page 22)

Varroa Resistance, cont'd

(Continued from page 21)

on shelves when the dust settles.

None of this means you must treat your hives at the first sign of trouble. You've got options. Integrated Pest Management gives us plenty of tools: brood breaks, heat treatments, screened bottom boards, drone brood removal, and even mechanical grooming aids like "bee gyms." We haven't even got to chemicals yet. Even our Geelong winters may help. All these methods help reduce mite pressure, and if you can keep your numbers down without chemicals, that's fantastic.

No beekeeper I know wants to add chemicals to their hive. But when mite levels hit the threshold, sometimes a treatment is the difference between a colony that survives and one that collapses. As multiple studies show, varroa can drive colonies to collapse, but the disappearance of susceptible colonies is not the same as the evolution of resistance. Extinction removes bees; evolution requires heritable traits that improve survival.

When you do need to treat, rotating modes of action is essential to prevent resistance. We are living in a country where our food system, our pollination capacity, and our beekeeping community depend on keeping colonies alive through the varroa era.

As a club, our role is straightforward: we share good information, support each other, and encourage sound, legal beekeeping practices across our community. And as members, it helps to remember that beekeeping has never been a one-answer solution; ask ten beekeepers and you'll still walk away with twelve opinions. Respecting those different approaches is part of what keeps our club strong. At the end of the day, you're the one standing in front of your hive, making the decisions that are right for your bees.

It would be lovely to have a strain of varroa-resistant honey bees, but it seems doing nothing and letting nature take its course is not the direct route, and unfortunately science, bee genetics and breeding isn't here yet either. Maybe the best thing we can do is ensure there's still a beekeeping industry on the other side of varroa.

Special thanks to Bianca Giggins at the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council for her feedback on my early draft, including updates to commercial operation numbers and farm-gate sales figures. Bianca's insights were also instrumental in identifying research on Australia's feral honey bee populations and highlighting the broader implications for national food security.

Thank you also to Jurg Schutz for his thoughtful questions around citation accuracy and for showing me how to use Microsoft Word citations.

The Geelong Beekeepers Club has previously welcomed Dr Nadine Chapman and Dr Jody Gerdts as guest speakers, and they've recently published [an insightful piece on naturally varroa-surviving honeybee populations](#). Their work adds an important perspective to the national conversation about how managed and unmanaged colonies survive or fail in the presence of varroa.

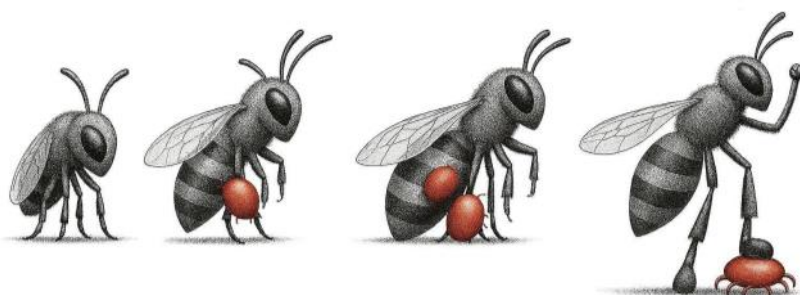
Nathan Whitford is the president of the Geelong Beekeepers Club.

This article originally appeared in the Geelong Beekeepers Club May 2026 newsletter.

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EVOLUTION OF HONEYBEES



Yellow-legged Hornet

New Zealand's warning to Australia

By Mike Allerton

In November 2025, New Zealand confirmed the discovery of yellow-legged hornets, *Vespa velutina*, on Auckland's north shore. For Australian beekeepers, the news was sobering. New Zealand had until then been free of the pest, and its arrival brought a threat already familiar to beekeepers in Europe and parts of Asia, suddenly much closer to Australia. By early May 2026, Biosecurity New Zealand had located and destroyed 77 queen hornets and 132 nests. No hornets or nests had been found since early April, but the eradication operation was continuing, supported by more than 17,400 public notifications of suspected sightings.¹

The New Zealand response has been rapid, serious and technically impressive. A surveillance zone extending 11 kilometres from detections was established, with protein and carbohydrate traps, bait stations, property searches, more than 50 field staff per day, specialist advice from overseas response teams, radio tracking technology imported from the Netherlands, and a protein bait, Vesplex, designed to be taken back to nests and kill the entire colony. More than 575 registered apiaries lie within the surveillance zone, so beekeepers have been drawn closely into the search effort.¹ This is not simply about protecting honey production. New Zealand authorities are clear that the yellow-legged hornet

threatens honey bees, wild bees and other insects, with flow-on risks to pollination and biodiversity.¹

A hornet with a history of invasion

The yellow-legged hornet is native to parts of Asia, particularly regions of China and south-east Asia. The invasive form now spreading internationally is usually identified as *Vespa velutina nigrithorax*. It was first recorded outside its native range in South Korea in 2003, then in south-west France in 2004, probably after arriving in imported goods from China. From France it spread through much of western Europe, including Spain, Portugal, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, and it has also invaded Japan.^{2,3} It has the familiar hallmarks of a successful invader: fertile queens, effective dispersal, adaptability, and a talent for using human transport networks.

Its arrival in New Zealand matters to Australia because it proves the pest can cross oceans and establish in a temperate southern hemisphere environment. Australia already lists the yellow-legged hornet as a high-priority exotic environmental pest, alongside *Tropilaelaps* mites.⁴ The biosecurity concern is justified. Once established, this hornet is difficult and expensive to suppress, and eradication becomes harder with every generation of queens that escapes detection.

(Continued on page 24)



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Yellow-legged Hornet, cont'd

(Continued from page 23)

What it does to bees

To the beekeeper, the yellow-legged hornet is not simply another wasp. It is an aerial predator with a particular talent for hunting honey bees. Workers station themselves in front of hive entrances and hover, or 'hawk', waiting for returning foragers. They seize bees in flight, carry them to a perch, remove the head, wings, legs and abdomen, and take the protein-rich thorax back to feed developing larvae.^{5,6}

The visible losses at the entrance are only part of the damage. As predation pressure builds, honey bees become reluctant to fly. Foraging slows or stops, pollen and nectar intake fall, and the colony may enter a state often described as foraging paralysis. That loss of normal flight activity can weaken a colony long before the beekeeper sees a large pile of dead bees. Weakened colonies become more vulnerable to robbing, starvation and collapse, and hornets may enter weak hives to take brood and honey.^{5,7}

European honey bees, *Apis mellifera*, are particularly exposed because they did not evolve alongside this predator. The Asian honey bee, *Apis cerana*, has defensive behaviours such as shimmering and stronger collective responses to hawking hornets, while European honey bees are much less effective at defending themselves.⁶ The damage is not confined to managed colonies. Yellow-legged hornets prey on wild bees, native wasps, flies and other flying insects, so establishment would be a biodiversity problem as well as a beekeeping problem.^{1,8}

What the sting means for people

The yellow-legged hornet has a painful sting, and like bees and wasps it can cause dangerous allergic reactions in susceptible people. Unlike a honey bee, a hornet does not leave its sting behind and can sting repeatedly. The sting is generally experienced as more painful than a honey bee sting, because hornets are larger and can inject venom more than once, but the greatest risk comes from disturbing a nest rather than from individual hornets foraging away from it.^{1,9}

For beekeepers, the practical point is that a hornet taking bees at a hive entrance is not the same level of danger as a nest. Large secondary nests can contain many hundreds or thousands of workers and may be built high in trees, under eaves, in sheds or in other sheltered places. Disturbing one can provoke a strong defensive response. New Zealand's official advice is blunt: do not attempt to remove or spray a suspected nest yourself. Take a clear photograph from a safe distance and report it.¹

What beekeepers should look for

The adult hornet is distinctive once the key features are known. It is larger than a honey bee and larger than the common wasps most Australians are familiar with. The body is mostly dark, with a velvety brown-black thorax, narrow yellow bands on the first abdominal segments, a broader yellow fourth abdominal segment, and, most importantly, dark legs ending in bright yellow

feet. The face is orange-yellow when viewed from the front.¹

Beekeepers should also notice the behaviour, not just the insect. Repeated hovering in front of hive entrances, bees refusing to fly in otherwise good weather, or a dark hornet carrying off bees are warning signs. In spring, queens build small primary nests, sometimes about the size of a tennis ball, often under eaves, in sheds, carports, outbuildings or other sheltered structures. Later in the season, workers may construct much larger secondary nests, up to about 80 centimetres tall, commonly high in trees.¹

If a suspect hornet or nest is seen in Australia, the right action is the same as for any possible exotic pest: do not try to solve the problem yourself. Photograph it if that can be done safely, note the location carefully, and report it immediately to the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline on 1800 084 881. A single confirmed queen found early is a biosecurity incident. A queen ignored until she has produced daughter queens is the beginning of a national problem.

Yellow-legged hornet or Tropilaelaps, which is the greater threat?

The discovery in New Zealand naturally raises the question of which exotic pest should worry Australian beekeepers more: yellow-legged hornet or *Tropilaelaps* mite. Both matter, but they are different kinds of threat.

Yellow-legged hornets are large and visible. They build nests that can be found, they attack from outside the hive, and suspicious sightings can be reported by beekeepers and the public. That visibility gives biosecurity agencies a fighting chance if the incursion is detected early, as New Zealand is now demonstrating. If eradication failed, the pest would be serious for beekeeping and very serious for native insects, particularly in cooler and temperate regions with suitable climate. It would also add a new layer of management to apiary work, especially in late summer and autumn when predation pressure is greatest.

Tropilaelaps is different. These mites reproduce rapidly in brood, feed on developing bees, spread viruses and can drive colonies into severe decline. Australian authorities have long regarded *Tropilaelaps* as one of the serious exotic mite threats to honey bees, and NSW DPI states that if it entered and established in Australia it would be expected to cause major colony losses.^{10,11} Unlike hornets, *Tropilaelaps* would not announce itself by hovering in front of the entrance. It would be inside the hive, easily moved with bees and brood, and much harder to detect before spread had occurred.

From a strictly beekeeping point of view, *Tropilaelaps* is probably the greater long-term threat to Australia. That is a judgement based on the biology rather than an official ranking. A hornet incursion may be contained if found early; an established brood mite would become an enduring within-hive parasite requiring ongoing surveillance and treatment, much as varroa now does. Yellow-legged hornet would be a severe pest. *Tropilaelaps* could become a structural change to

(Continued on page 25)

Yellow-legged Hornet, cont'd

(Continued from page 24)

Australian beekeeping.

The lesson from New Zealand

New Zealand's response deserves close attention from Australian beekeepers. It shows the value of public reporting, decisive action, specialist advice, and using several tools at once rather than waiting for certainty. It also shows how narrow the window can be. By the time the first hornets were found, other queens and nests already existed. Eradication may still succeed, and everyone with an interest in pollinators should hope that it does, but the incursion is a warning.

For Australian beekeepers, the practical message is to not panic. It is familiarity. Learn the appearance of the yellow-legged hornet. Learn the sort of nests it builds. Notice unusual predation at hive entrances. Report suspicious sightings immediately. At the same time, keep learning the pests we cannot see from the gate, especially *Tropilaelaps*. The next major exotic threat to Australian bees may arrive as a conspicuous black-and-yellow hunter, or as a tiny mite hidden under brood cappings. We need to be ready for both.

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Varroa Mite Pyrethroid Resistance In Victoria

From Agriculture Victoria

Varroa mites resistant to pyrethroid chemicals have been detected in an apiary located in north-east Victoria. We are currently undertaking further analysis of samples with results expected at the end of the month.

This detection follows reports of varroa mites resistant to pyrethroid and formamidine [amitraz] chemicals (commonly used chemicals to control varroa mites) earlier this year in New South Wales and Queensland.

We wish to publicly acknowledge the leadership and integrity of a beekeeper who reported suspected miticide resistance in their apiary. The presence of pyrethroid-resistant mites in the apiary is not a result of individual actions, rather a product of broader circumstances in preceding months. Proactive monitoring and observation are hallmarks of good beekeeping and reporting something unusual is good for the entire industry.

Recommended actions for beekeepers:

- monitor mite levels regularly for early varroa detection and effective control. Treat only when thresholds are reached.

- adopt Integrated Pest Management (IPM) using cultural and mechanical controls, alongside chemical controls.

- monitor mite levels before, during and after miticide treatments and keep records of all treatments and mite monitoring.

rotate varroa treatments with chemicals of different modes of action. Follow chemical labels and permit conditions.

If mite numbers continue to increase when using a synthetic treatment please contact the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline on 1800 084 881 or submit a report [online](#) through Agriculture Victoria website.

[More information is available on the AHBIC website.](#)

Early reporting rules out exotic bee mite threat

The early reporting of a suspect mite by a Victorian beekeeper has reinforced the critical role beekeepers play in protecting Australia's honey bee industry.

In early April, a beekeeper noticed an unusual mite on a distressed honey bee that had entered their home, and promptly reported the find through the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline. [See "Mystery Mites" in our May 2026 issue for an account of this same incident]

Clear photographs were also shared within the local beekeeping community, allowing the report to be escalated quickly.

The images were reviewed by Agriculture Victoria's apiary team, who noted similarities with *Tropilaelaps*, a serious exotic mite, not present in Australia and regarded internationally as a major threat to honey bees.

"Anything that looks remotely like *Tropilaelaps* is treated with urgency," notes Dr Stephen Dibley, acting Chief Plant Health Officer at Agriculture Victoria. "Early reporting gives us the best possible chance to assess the risk quickly and take action if needed."

Biosecurity officers contacted the beekeeper the

same day and attended the property to collect samples and undertake tracing, including hive movements and recent management practices. Samples of the mite, bees from an alcohol wash, and bottom board material were delivered to Agriculture Victoria's AgriBio laboratories for detailed examination.

Initial microscopic analysis indicated the mite did not match *Tropilaelaps*, but further testing was undertaken to rule it out conclusively.

"Our laboratories apply a rigorous, multistep diagnostic process," Dr Dibley explains. "Even when early signs are reassuring, we don't stop there. We use specialist expertise and multiple methods to make sure we're confident in the outcome."

While DNA testing was inconclusive for species identification due to environmental contamination, expert morphological assessment and exclusion testing confirmed the mite was not *Tropilaelaps* and posed no exotic pest threat.

The beekeeper was informed of the result and thanked for their vigilance.

"This is a really positive biosecurity story," Dr Dibley reports. "It shows how alert beekeepers, rapid reporting, and strong coordination between industry, field staff and laboratories protect the entire sector."

Australia's freedom from many exotic bee pests depends on constant surveillance and swift action when something unusual is detected.

"Beekeepers are our eyes on the ground," Dr Dibley advises, "if you see something that doesn't look right, reporting it early protects your own hives and the broader industry."

If you see unusual mites, larvae, unexplained symptoms or abnormal hive losses call the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline on 1800 084 881 or submit a report through your state biosecurity website.

Reminder: honey culture tests

Under the Australian Honey Bee Industry [Code of Practice](#) and the *Livestock Disease Control Act 1994*, beekeepers with 20 or more hives are required to complete an annual Honey Culture Test on a pooled honey sample.

Honey Culture tests can provide early detection of [American Foulbrood](#) in your hives and assist in early control and management.

The 2025-2026 Code Compliance reporting section is available through [BeeMAX](#) for all beekeepers to complete and record:

- date of last successful completion of Honey Bee Pest and Disease training
- when hive inspections for pests and disease were



(Continued on page 27)

Varroa Mite Pyrethroid Resistance In Victoria, cont'd

(Continued from page 26)

completed

- details of mite inspections completed and the method used

- current honey culture test results

- that record keeping is being maintained.

We have more information on [how to prepare your honey sample](#) on our website.

Are you a chemical supplier to the Victorian beekeeping industry?

Look out for an upcoming detailed email with information specific for suppliers of chemical bee treatments.

If you do not receive this email or know a supplier who didn't get this email please contact us to be added to the list.

VBBWG – Victorian Bee Biosecurity Working Group

The Victorian Apiarists' Association Annual Conference (4-6 June) includes a biosecurity symposium on

Saturday 6 June with keynote speakers on varroa resistance and treatment, as well as reviewing the future threat of *Tropilaelaps*.

Details and registration via the [VAA website](#).

In collaboration with VAA, many bee clubs have appointed varroa specialists to provide advice.

Their contact details are available on the VAA website www.vicbeekeepers.com.au/Club-Varroa-Specialist-Contacts.

To contact your VBBWG industry representatives, visit the [VAA website](#).

Hive disposal and cancelling registration

Are you disposing of, selling or giving away your hives?

In Victoria, beekeepers must notify the Bees Registrar in writing within 7 days if this happens.

Victorian beekeepers can do this through their [BeeMAX online diary](#)

You can find information and appropriate forms to use on [Selling or Giving away a beehive](#).

**Deadline for copy for the July 2026 journal is 10pm
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Season Report

By John Edmonds

The start of May has seen some rain, which will encourage farmers to sow crops and give the forests a drink. It has become very dry around the Geelong region and the grass that grew from the past rains has started to become brown. Few flowering plants can be found, fortunately the hives have stored pollen. The cold weather has persisted and it has been too cold to do more testing for varroa. Most hives have been packed down for winter and some honey is still over clearer boards waiting to be removed. The shed is full of boxes waiting to be extracted, but we seem to be so busy with other chores like packing honey. Honey sales are variable with customers looking for value.

Start of May

Winter flowering ironbark [*Eucalyptus sideroxylon*] has started to flower and combined with the warm spell of weather the hives filled an ideal box in a fortnight. The first week of June is forecast to be cooler but this winter is predicted to be warmer and drier than usual. So, the decision will be “do we put the bees to sleep or keep them working?”

A beekeeper told me that his hives were packed down to eight frames of bees for winter, but at a recent inspection he discovered they were now six frames of bees. Is it the poor autumn or varroa treatments causing the bees to drop strength? Another beekeeper is reluctant to reduce his double hives as the brood box has a lot of brood and little honey stores.

Hive scales report hives in the Geelong area vary from 48 to 65kg.

Flowering Observations:

Bees handle yellow gum [*Eucalyptus leucoxylon*] flowering during the winter better than the ironbark. When the bees have extracted frames, they can fill them quickly with sloppy nectar during the cold, and that can cause fermentation problems. Presently the yellow gum [*Eucalyptus leucoxylon*] throughout Central Victoria is looking a picture and yielding well.

I am finding that washing bees for varroa testing takes a lot of time, but is necessary to evaluate varroa numbers.

I have taken an interest in soil fertility and the forest floor needs the bark and leaves dropped from the trees to form the compost to nourish the plants. I think the constant environmental burning of the forests has a negative effect and reduces the health of the forest. I have watched a messmate / stringybark forest [*Eucalyptus obliqua*] for many years that has had constant burning, and I observe the trees have not had a general budding for over a decade – just the odd tree forms budding and bud drop seems to occur.

The composition of these forests has changed since the 1980s when I took out the bee sites. Prickly wattle / kerosene bush [*Acacia paradoxa*] has become rampant due to its germination being aided by fire. Incidentally I have seen LandCare regenerative plantings that are planting this shrub which tends to become a weedy thicket. It flowers at the same time as the almonds, providing pollen.

In the Grampians and Mallee areas the Murray pine [*Callitris gracilis* subsp. *murrayensis*] was not obvious in the past but now is rampant. It will be interesting to watch if it increases after the recent fires.



Hives located in a Bellarine Peninsula town may need feeding before winter. Some hives have prospered, but others, that may have older queens, still have brood but little honey stores. Hives have fresh nectar and yellow gum [*Eucalyptus leucoxylon* subsp. *bellarinensis*] is starting to flower. A massive flowering occurred on the Western Australian red flowering gum [*Corymbia ficifolia*] but disappointingly did not provide a honey flow.

A beekeeper who has become ill decided to not attend to his hives. He asked if I would inspect them. Despite being in a good location on the edge of Geelong the bees have not done well this season. The reasons are that the sugar gum [*Eucalyptus cladocalyx*] failed, the dry conditions caused weeds that normally flower not to, and, most importantly, the hives have not been requeened. I noted that the hives that swarmed and successfully requeened themselves were his best hives. Fortunately, no varroa.

A beekeeper who has become ill decided to not attend to his hives. He asked if I would inspect them. Despite being in a good location on the edge of Geelong the bees have not done well this season. The reasons are that the sugar gum [*Eucalyptus cladocalyx*] failed, the dry conditions caused weeds that normally flower not to, and, most importantly, the hives have not been requeened. I noted that the hives that swarmed and successfully requeened themselves were his best hives. Fortunately, no varroa.

13/5/2026

Inspected an apiary containing large established hives and five frame full depth nucleus hives. Due to the very dry April, the smaller colonies had minimal brood and fewer bees were in the colonies than last month, but the stronger colonies still had good brood and bee strength. The larger hives obviously were flying further than the small hives. Fresh nectar and pollen was present. All hives were given my protein patties and it was interesting to see the bees instantly start feeding on them, and the entrances of the nucleus hives had bees excited and congregating on the fronts of the hives. This year

(Continued on page 29)

Season Report, cont'd

(Continued from page 28)

blanketweed [*Aizoon pubescens*] has hardly yielded its strong-flavoured honey and in some areas especially under trees it has died due to the very dry soil.

Honey competitions.

I would like to remind beekeepers that the Royal Geelong Show has a honey competition and for the first time the Sunbury show will have a honey competition.

I judged the J Beekeeping Club (Sunbury) honey and beeswax competition. The honey exhibits were very well presented with excellent clean honey. The flavours were obviously from mixed floral sources due to the difficult season. Some of the honey was starting to candy and not clear in appearance. Some had been poured just before the competition so had not settled. The wax candles were very difficult to judge as they were exceptionally good and all very similar in quality, although many different designs. Resulting in many equal first, seconds and thirds. The Geelong Beekeeping Club competition saw improved presentation of exhibits and quality. Flavours of the honey were mostly mixed floral sources but two samples were very good and mostly red gum [*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*].

Over the past few years, I have had good results from giving the bees protein patties just before winter. Faba bean flour has high protein content and Agrisea has amino acids and minerals and vitamins. I use these as a base and now experimenting with additional supplements. When varroa becomes a problem feeding bees becomes a recommended way to help the bees. I am presently doing a test of four different recipes and will monitor which the bees prefer to eat.

I place protein patties made from faba bean flour, soy flour, Agrisea - and some sugar to combine the mixture - in the hives before winter and find they create brood and healthier bees for spring. Bees nibble them and I try and place them on top of the brood frames. I did this already and returned a fortnight later and observed nearly all the protein patties had been consumed.

Despite keeping bee hives in a remote location and making sure no bee products were taken into that area for over three years I was devastated to find a varroa mite in one hive wash. Initially, you think "it cannot be that small, surely it is something else." But using the phone to magnify the small critter and seeing the front legs protruding the shell, you know your beekeeping is about to change. Looking at it under a microscope you can see the legs underneath and you have no doubts. Since then, I have improved the washing technique and using multiple wash containers (copied from Randy Oliver) I number the hives and the jars and bring them home for closer inspection by straining the liquid. The bumpy roads also aid the separation of the mites from the bees. I conclude

that varroa can appear anywhere now as I have found it in places where I thought there was very few bee hives located.

A very good night was held at Werribeeks May meeting. Bill Backendorf outlined the Personal Protection Equipment that beekeepers need to wear when using oxalic acid treatments, especially for vaporizing. Many beekeepers are taking risks and using oxalic acid that is not approved food grade. Timber cleaner grade contains nasty chemicals. Full face masks with eye and nose protection and the correct activated charcoal cartridge with a particulate cartridge clipped on top is recommended. Inspect inside the mask that the valve is in place and the mask is not deformed. Do a test to make sure you have a seal on your face, and be clean shaven.

The question was asked "when do you know the cartridge needs replacing?" The cartridges have a two-year life span, but it is important to understand that this is the shelf life. The actual use time is measured in hours. You should keep track of the hours you have used a cartridge. If you have not kept track, estimate the number of times you used it and the minutes each time, and be generous in your estimate. It is better to replace a cartridge too early than too late. Store the cartridge sealed in a ziplock bag between uses.

Gloves must be strong and no holes or splits as handling acid treatments can result in burns that are not apparent till some hours later. No leather gloves. Nitrile types best.

Tyvek suits must be worn as invisible oxalic acid vapours condense on your clothing and if placed in the vehicle with you can become active, vaping you! It was said a beekeeper put the hot vaporizer in the car with his dog and the remaining fumes killed the dog.

Using the oxalic acid strips is much safer and does not require the mask but don't sniff the strips.

Using brood breaks will be essential.

It was suggested the threshold for varroa treatment be lowered to three varroa mites and treat immediately.

Another tip was that the seal on the varroa wash bottle leaks, but a shoe lace jammed into the lid ring effectively seals the wash bottle.

Reports from New South Wales and Queensland are horrific about the devastation varroa and small hive beetles are causing. I expect supply of bee hives for almond pollination will become a huge problem and supply of queen bees also. A beekeeper told me that his last shipment of queens from New South Wales were duds and all failed. I guess the varroa and treatments damaged the queens.

I have found more varroa near Inverleigh halfway to Teesdale. Only three mites from 15 hives tested. The

(Continued on page 30)

Season Report, cont'd

(Continued from page 29)

site is five kilometres from the first detection in this area in January.

My friend found varroa at the outskirts of Inverleigh 1/4/2026. One in a wash. 20/5/2026 the same hive washed had six, but after a day of the bottle sitting in the back of the ute, being shaken around, it was nine mites. Treatment was required quickly. Washing technique is very important.

A commercial beekeeper who has had varroa for over nine months discovered a hive in the apiary that missed the last treatment. The mite count was over 100. Just shows how quickly they multiply.

End of May

All the hive scales report minimal increase in weight and most going negative especially after rain events.

Yellow legged hornets are becoming a big problem in some countries overseas.

France, Spain and now Britain are unable to stop the spread. Auckland, New Zealand, discovered an incursion and are busy implementing high tech methods to try and eradicate the pest. We must be careful and not allow this pest to establish itself here.

An article from The Beekeepers Quarterly (BKQ) March 2026 explores the storage of pollen in the hive and the part "the art of lactic fermentation" plays. Briefly, fungicides from crop sprays will destroy yeast cells which lead to the spoilage of the bee bread. Formic acid is often used as a miticide to treat varroa and the acid disrupts the pH conditions and affects some of the bacterial and yeast species. This presents another thing for us to consider when treating varroa.

Another very interesting article in the same issue of BKQ was about Tongan beekeeping. A summary of it: all synthetic and organic treatments of varroa are banned by the Tongan government. The tropical climate is very humid which suppresses the varroa. This results in a reduction of varroa reproduction. Consequently, the bees swarm all through the year. The Tongan bees have adapted by using swarming to reduce the effects of varroa. When a hive swarms 60 to 70% of the varroa leave the hive with the swarm. A broodless period occurs while the queen is mating. This also occurs with the swarm. It has been found that bees kept in small hives are more productive. The recommended hive size is a ¾ size (WSP) brood nest and same size honey super over a queen excluder. Some swarms will be weak and die. An experiment by Loftus et al (2016)¹ of 12 small hive and 12 large hives resulted in just one third of varroa numbers in the small hives. Of the large hives only two survived of the original 12. The smaller colonies are used mainly for pollination of crops, and do not make much honey.

Large colonies produce large amounts of honey.

I find this fascinating as we are told that without treatments the hives will die. Perhaps beekeepers need to move away from the yellow Italian bees that make large amounts of brood. More selection of Carniolan queens that make small brood nests, yet can be as productive as hives with large amounts of brood.

A problem I have found that will affect recreational beekeepers: The pack sizes are too large and encourage beekeepers to use illegal treatments.

Aluen Cap Instructions (Summary)

Strips contain 10g of oxalic acid dihydrate

IT IS ILLEGAL TO SELL THE STRIPS INDIVIDUALLY. PACKAGE CONTAINS 60 STRIPS

Do not use over two consecutive treatment periods. Use only once a year.

Handle in a well-ventilated area.

8-10 frame hives use 4 strips

5-6 frame hives use 2 strips.

Treat all colonies simultaneously.

Place strips in hive for 42 days. Do not reuse strips.

Use at beginning or end of season.

Method of application

1 Open the hive

2 Perform and record surveillance

3 Remove strips from package

4 Fold gently each strip

5 Place strips over the top bars of the frames,

8 frame hives bars 2,4,6,8

5-6 frame nucleus hives, bars 2,4.

6 Remove strips after 42 days.

7 Perform surveillance and record results.

8 Discard unused strips after 24 hours of opening the package.

Withholding period after removing strips zero days

Safety – Harmful if swallowed, will damage eyes and skin, avoid contact. Wear cotton overalls, gloves and goggles. May cause allergy (contact dermatitis)

First Aid - if in eyes, hold open and wash for 15 minutes, contact doctor.

Store below 30°C in original container. Protect from sunlight.

Disposal – Deliver empty packaging to approved management facility.

Do not burn empty containers or product.

¹ Loftus, J.C., Smith, M.L. & Seeley, T.D. (2016) "How Honey Bee Colonies Survive in the Wild: Testing the Importance of Small Nests and Frequent Swarming." *PLoS ONE* 11(3): e0150362 <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4788434/>

Honey The Healer

THE CONVERSATION

Honey from Australian Wildflowers Has Potent Power to Kill Bacteria

By Kenya Fernandes,
Research Fellow, Faculty of Science,
University of Sydney

Before antibiotics and antiseptics, healers across ancient Egypt, Greece, and China reached for honey to treat wounds. [Archaeological evidence](#)¹ shows humans have been harvesting and collecting honey for thousands of years – and for much of that time, we understood it to be more than just food.

Today, honey sits in most kitchen cupboards as a perfectly ordinary pantry staple. But honey has never entirely shed its medicinal reputation. And modern research shows us why: it possesses genuine antimicrobial properties, capable of [killing or inhibiting a wide range of bacteria](#),² including drug-resistant strains.

This matters now more than ever. Antimicrobial resistance – where bacteria evolve to survive drugs designed to kill them – is one of the defining [public health crises of our time](#).³ Infections caused by these resistant microbes are becoming harder and more expensive to treat, creating an urgent need for alternative therapies.

Our new study, published in the journal [MicrobiologyOpen](#),⁴ shows honeys from Australia's native flora might be a big part of the solution.

What Did We Do?

We analysed 56 honey samples collected from more than 35 apiaries across New South Wales. Many samples came from landscapes recovering from the 2019–2020 bushfires. Most were derived from native Australian plants such as eucalyptus, leptospermum and melaleuca.

We tested the honeys against two common bacterial pathogens: *Staphylococcus aureus* (golden staph) and *E. coli* – both among the six leading causes of deaths [associated with antibiotic resistance](#).⁵ For each sample we measured the minimum concentration needed to stop bacterial growth. The lower the concentration, the more potent the honey.

We also carried out comprehensive chemical profiling, measuring sugars, organic acids, amino acids, enzymes and a wide range of plant-derived compounds. Statistical and machine-learning analyses helped us identify which chemical features best explained antibacterial strength.

What Did We Find?

More than three-quarters of the honey samples stopped bacterial growth even when the honeys were diluted to 10% or less. This places Australian native flora honeys alongside some of the world's most potent varieties.

The most striking factor was floral diversity.

Honeys from mixed floral sources – where bees foraged across multiple native plant species rather than a single species – were consistently the most antimicrobi-

al.

This potency wasn't due to any single compound but to a chemically rich combination.

Multiple bioactive factors – substances that have a measurable effect on living cells or tissues – worked together to inhibit bacteria. These included naturally produced hydrogen peroxide, plant-derived phenolic compounds (naturally occurring chemicals that plants produce as part of their own defence systems), and antioxidants.

When bacteria encounter honey, this combination acts on several fronts at once. The low moisture content draws water out of bacterial cells, while the acidity disrupts their metabolism. Hydrogen peroxide damages their cellular structures, and phenolic and antioxidant compounds interfere with their ability to function and reproduce.

The strength of mixed floral honeys may also reflect the health of the bees themselves.

Access to diverse forage keeps colonies well nourished. And healthier bees produce more biologically active honey as their enzymes help integrate and activate the plant compounds into a complex antimicrobial mixture.

What Does This Mean for Antimicrobial Resistance?

Honey won't replace antibiotics for serious or systemic infections.

But for topical applications – chronic wounds, burns, or surgical site infections – it is a genuinely promising option. Because honey attacks bacteria through multiple simultaneous mechanisms, resistance is far less likely to emerge than with single-target drugs. Our team is now exploring these applications in more detail.

Australia is particularly well-placed to lead in bioactive honey production. Around 70% of Australian honey [comes from native plants](#).⁶ These plants are found not only in forests but also across farmland, regional landscapes, and urban green spaces.

Our findings show that prioritising floral diversity over monoculture isn't just good for ecosystems – it produces more potent honey. With the beekeeping industry under serious pressure from bushfires, floods, and now the [varroa mite](#),⁷ protecting and restoring florally-rich landscapes is critical: for bee health, for industry resilience, and for expanding our natural antimicrobial toolkit.

In the meantime, the next jar of Australian honey you buy may just be doing more good than you realise.

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(Continued on page 32)

Honey The Healer, cont'd

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Dr Kenya Fernandes is a microbiologist at the University of Sydney whose work investigates how microbes shape the health of pollinators, ecosystems, and people.

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THE CONVERSATION

How honeybees really crown their queens

Royal cribs and ladies-in-waiting: new details about the creation of bee royalty

University of California - Riverside

For generations, scientists believed a queen honeybee was made almost entirely by diet: feed an ordinary larva enough royal jelly and a ruler emerges. But new research suggests queens are created through a more elaborate process.

Young worker bees construct specialized nursery chambers complete with custom wax, warmer temperatures, and devoted attendants that help determine whether a larva becomes royalty.

Published in the journal *Nature*, the study found that wax chambers where future queens develop, called queen cells or “royal cribs,” are not simply protective shelters, but carefully engineered environments essential to producing healthy queens. Researchers identified a previously unrecognized class of young worker bees dubbed “queen cell builders” that appear uniquely adapted for the task.

“The old idea was relatively simple: take an egg, move it into a queen cell, feed it royal jelly, and you get a queen,” said Boris Baer, entomologist and director of the Center for Integrative Bee Research (CIBER) at the University of California, Riverside, whose laboratory contributed to the work. “What we found is that there’s an entire machinery behind this process. It’s much more sophisticated than we imagined.”

Read the full article [here](#)



VAA
VICTORIAN APIARISTS' ASSOCIATION INC.

HiveMeet

Pollen Replacing Feed: A new standard in honey bee nutrition

Guest Speaker: Thierry Bogaert

Streaming Live  Thursday 2nd July, 8pm

youtube.com/VictorianApiaristsAssociation

VAA HiveMeet is sponsored by B-Qual 



Make & Mend Day

Learn how to make & wire frames, boxes, lids, wax frames and much more!

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Sunday July 19th 1pm

Ross & Ange's place

49 Stephenson St, Huntly

Let Peta know what your want to make b4 8th July

RSVP Peta

bbvaasecretary@gmail.com

Bring a plate to share

Non members \$10 per head

AHBIC Updates

CEO Report May 2026

Over the last month AHBIC has been consumed by the miticide resistance issue and the impacts that are being felt on the ground. We have been actively talking to the government and pollination dependent industries to raise awareness and find support for our industry. We have met with Research and Development Corporations (RDCs) to ensure all the research is being directed into the right areas and have been working with our member bodies to find support options for industry.

We are in the middle of conference season with the AHBIC team recently attending the NSWAA conference in Bathurst. The 300 delegates heard from many excellent speakers with a clear focus on understanding resistant mites and the challenges that our beekeepers will be facing. Other presenters talked to the details of the new mite population, how we can test for resistance and how viruses interact with varroa.

Plant Health Australia AGM

Last week I attended the mid-year series of plant health meetings in Adelaide. A weeklong series of meetings that cover all things plant biosecurity and The Deed. It was a great opportunity to network with the other 57 signatories to The Deed including pollination dependent industries and jurisdictional biosecurity leaders.

Every five years The Deed is reviewed to incorporate lessons learned from incursions and work through any required amendments to The Deed agreement to ensure it delivers effective responses. The initial consultation phase of The Deed review is complete along with a deed signatory workshop. Whilst it is not expected that there will be significant changes we are pleased that there will be improvements.

Imported Honey

In this newsletter we have included an article about the recent national honey authenticity survey and what it means for the industry. This is positive for beekeepers, with DAFF recognising the seriousness of the issue and showing a commitment to finding solutions for industry.

Honey Bee Industry Champions

AHBIC was successful in receiving a capacity building grant from AgriFutures Australia recently. The grant has enabled eight up-and-coming beekeepers and researchers to receive up to \$1,000 grant each to assist with the cost of attending a state conference. We received several quality responses and chose eight successful candidates. Applicants were able to nominate the conference they wanted to attend, and we had four recipients attend the NSW conference in Bathurst. The remaining successful candidates will attend their chosen conference in the coming weeks. AHBIC believes this is a great small project to encourage new beekeepers and researchers to take steps to further themselves and their careers within our industry.

Changes to the BOLT course platform

Plant Health Australia (PHA) have been working toward launching a new platform for the Biosecurity

Online Training (BOLT) for beekeepers course. PHA have noted the previous website management business became insolvent, forcing PHA to negotiate a new contract to continue the BOLT course access for industry. The new web platform, transitioning between now and 30 June 2026, will result in a new look course page but the online content will remain the same. PHA will provide a step-by-step transition guide in the coming days, which we will share with beekeepers. If you are due to re-do the BOLT course between now and 30 June, and have any questions about the website, course or certificates, we recommend you reach out to us via bianca@honeybee.org.au or to your state Bee Biosecurity Officer who will soon have details to support you through the change.

The Month Ahead

There are a number of conferences in June including Hort Connections in Adelaide, the Victorian Apiarists Association conference in Melbourne, the Queensland Beekeepers Association in Bundaberg, followed by the South Australian Apiarists Association conference in Morphettville. An AHBIC team member or Executive Director will be present at all, and we look forward to talking with beekeepers and learning from the presentations.

In addition to the conferences, I will be working on a submission for the National Biosecurity Reform consultation, participating in the ACCC Ag Committee Working Group, in addition to our continued lobbying to government around varroa impacts.

There are many beekeepers doing it tough at the moment, always remember to be kind to one another and look out for your mates and colleagues as we navigate these challenging times together.

Federal Agriculture Department's Imported Honey Authenticity Survey Results

The current threats to the Australian beekeeping industry mean that it has never been more important to protect and promote our industry to ensure our long-term economic viability. Back in 2022, AHBIC launched our "[Honey Fighting Fund](#)" to begin a multi-pronged approach which included gathering authenticity data in order to protect Australia's beekeeping industry. The plan is to use the de-identified information to build a solid, data driven platform to advocate on behalf of industry to our government for policy reform.

DAFF Honey Survey Details

As a result of AHBIC's pressure and relationship-building with our federal counterparts, we can now share work that has been undertaken. The Australian Federal Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) conducted a pilot survey to assess the authenticity of imported honey samples and compare the department's current border tests with the performance of selected commercially available analytical tests.

The survey was undertaken with food regulatory agencies in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia, which assisted

(Continued on page 35)

AHBIC Updates, cont'd

(Continued from page 34)

with sample collection activities. Sampling was conducted between October and November 2025, with samples collected from importers and retail sources representing 95% of the imported honey (excluding NZ).

Laboratory analysis was conducted by the National Measurement Institute.

Testing included both:

- the existing Imported Food Inspection Scheme honey testing panel (current federal mandated tests for imported honey) which includes C4 carbon isotope test, moisture content and reducing sugars, and
- a Nuclear Magnetic Resonance (NMR)-based honey profiling method (which generates a chemical fingerprint of honey samples, compares samples with an international reference database and identifies atypical profiles).

AHBIC advocated for additional test assays to be included but were unable to secure the support from DAFF, however additional samples were taken to allow for further analysis.

What was the testing looking at:

Australia's current government importation testing protocols utilise the C4 carbon isotope honey test, which we have demonstrated through AHBIC's Honey Fighting Fund initial testing, to be insufficient in detecting basic global fraudulent methods. The DAFF pilot survey was designed to help substantiate AHBIC claims through comparing the panel test results with the NMR profiling.

Survey Results

All samples passed the government mandated panel of tests. However, a number of samples were identified through NMR as suspected to have foreign sugars present. These results align with the previous AHBIC tests results and has highlighted the problem to government through this independent testing.

Potential Industry Outcomes

The DAFF survey has demonstrated the potential weakness of the existing testing assays. DAFF have committed to working with AHBIC to evaluate alternative or additional testing to strengthen our border protection.

Results have been shared with the participating state food regulators and coordinated engagement with participating businesses is underway to communicate results with importers.

DAFF is now considering how best to implement the findings of the survey. AHBIC will continue to put pressure on the department for change, but it is a slow process. DAFF will continue working collaboratively with industry, state and territory regulators, technical experts and international counterparts to further evaluate available analytical methods that may strengthen Australia's approach to detecting imports of adulterated honey.

AHBIC Survey



AHBIC is urgently planning for crisis talks with government and we want to ensure industry information is properly represented across Australia. The more beekeepers who take part, the stronger our collective voice becomes.



The Australian Colony Loss Survey provides valuable hive management and hive health data for the beekeeping industry.

This survey provides critical data to support and guide the Australian beekeeping industry as it navigates an increasingly complex set of challenges. Covering key issues such as Varroa mite management, queen health and failure, seasonal pressures, and broader biosecurity risks, the survey offers a comprehensive snapshot of current industry conditions.

AUSTRALIAN COLONY LOSS REPORT 2025 CLICK HERE

Importantly, more beekeeper participation in the Australian Colony Loss Survey is the key to making the survey as valuable as possible to all stakeholders.

AHBIC recently hosted a short industry survey which was useful in capturing a snapshot in time of beekeepers who have considered exiting industry, we are utilising that data to advocate to government for actionable change in the coming weeks. Although the survey results are important, they are being used in the short term to give us clear industry situational awareness and data to share with government.

AHBIC is still urging Australian beekeepers to commit to the Australian Colony Loss Survey in 2026 to make sure all the important industry matters are captured and recorded now and into the future.

AHBIC will be playing a key role in taking the Australian Colony Loss Survey forward in 2026. We are looking forward to implementing a steering committee and taking feedback to address industry concerns, new ideas or questions to be added and any changes industry stakeholders may have moving forward. Please reach out to bianca@honeybee.org.au for questions you may have.



AgriFutures Honeybee & Pollination Panel; [Commercial Honey Producers and Researchers Wanted](#)

Submissions are now being accepted. Submissions close at 12:00PM 20 July 2026 (AEST)

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Website: [Honey bees | Livestock](http://Honey%20bees%20Livestock%20and%20animals%20Agriculture%20Victoria)

and animals | Agriculture Victoria

Website:

[www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/livestock-](http://www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/livestock-and-animals/honey-bees)

[and-animals/honey-bees](http://www.agriculture.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](mailto:honeybee.biosecurity@agriculture.vic.gov.au)

[@agriculture.vic.gov.au](mailto:honeybee.biosecurity@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

Email: [beekeeper.registration](mailto:beekeeper.registration@agriculture.vic.gov.au)

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[@agriculture.vic.gov.au](mailto:honeybee.biosecurity@agriculture.vic.gov.au)

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[@agriculture.vic.gov.au](mailto: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

for bee sites on Crown land

All enquiries should go to a

adminhub@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.us@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

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2nd & 4th Sunday of month.

collingwoodbees@gmail.com

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Ph: 0427 552 001

honeybeenews@bigpond.com

Contacts

VAA Inc Regional Groups

Bendigo Branch:

Secretary: Peta Dawe

bbvaasecretary@gmail.com

Chair: Stafford Kelly

bbvaachair@gmail.com

Treasurer: Michael St.Clair

bbvaatreasurer@outlook.com

General Information Meetings -

1st Wed. each month (except Jan & Dec)

Dinner at 6.00pm (optional)

Meeting at 7.00 pm.

Lakeside Hotel, Bendigo.

Please register with the

Secretary to attend Meetings

Executive Committee Meeting:

3rd Wed month as required.

Venue: As notified.

Melbourne Section:

Chair: A/Prof James Doery

Deputy Chair: David Basket

Treasurer: Janet Conos

Secretary, Gill Greenstein

Ph: 0422 058 180

[vaamelbournesection](mailto:vaamelbournesection@hotmail.com)

@hotmail.com

[www.vicbeekeepers.com.au/](http://www.vicbeekeepers.com.au/Melbourne-Section)

[Melbourne-Section](#)

Information/ Education Meetings:

from 7:30 pm the last Thursday

of each month except December

Location: Church of Christ,

1 The Avenue, Surry Hills.

Sunraysia Branch:

Naomi Forbes-Wilson

Ph: 0407 243 313

billabonghoney@yahoo.com

VAA Inc. Library Trust

Secretary: Russell Goodman,

Ph 03 9735 3836

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: Lorraine Glowacki:

secretarygaa1966@gmail.com

0402 026 111

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: wbfsm@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@melbourne](mailto:secretary@melbournebeekeepersclub.org.au)

[beekeepersclub.org.au](mailto: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 Gerdson

Secretary: Helen Morland

Treasurer: Debbie Conway

E: werribeeks@gmail.com

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

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HONEY BUYERS

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Jodie Goldsworthy

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

Capilano Honey Ltd
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Maryborough,
VIC 3465
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0419 431 652
Contact: Stephen Covey

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

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

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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Index of Advertisers

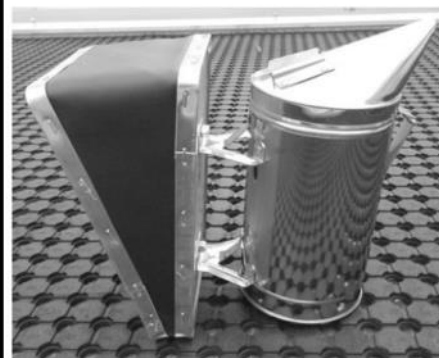
AgriFutures	21
AIR CTI	23
Aluen Cap	9
Aussie CTI	8
Aust. Queen Beeline	12
Aust. Queen Bee Exporters	12
Becs Beehive	17
Beeplas Australia	17
Buzz Bee	19
Dalrymple View	9
Denmar Apiaries	27
Kelvin Trading	Inside front
Lyson	15
Prestige Stainless	13
Select Harvest	11
Stafford Engineering - EzyLoader	Back
Steritech	7
Veto-pharma	21
Whirrakee Honey	38
Whirrakee Woodware	25

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VAA Donation Program Benefits

- Your business name and logo are included in VAA promotions on social media, bulletins and website.
- Your business is listed as a sponsor of the VAA's booth at the MRS.
- Your business' contact details are included with every purchase so consumers know how to purchase your honey throughout the year.
- Your apiary will be featured in a "Hive to Plate" promo at the VAA booth.
- VAA booth volunteers will be trained on the unique features of your product.

We are seeking:

- | | | |
|----------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| • Mono-floral honey | • Pure beeswax candles or other items | • Unique flavoured honey products |
| • Bulk honey or pre-packed | • Other beeswax or propolis-based products | • Non-alcoholic honey beverages |
| • Jars or Tubs | | |
| • Comb honey | | |

Other Melbourne Show Volunteer Opportunities

Join one of the most enjoyable, engaging and impactful projects the VAA organises every year. We have a wide range of committee roles to suit your interests, availability and skills.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Booth Volunteers<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Show Booth Day-Managers◦ Show Booth Ass't Day Managers◦ Show Booth Volunteers (Honey sales)• Bee Wranglers<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Assist during the show to organise our live bee demonstrations. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Show Planning<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Sponsor Coordination & Outreach◦ Booth Design and Branding◦ Education Programming |
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CONTACT: vaa@vicbeekeepers.com.au

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