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VAA Board

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formic acid

Randy Oliver's hot weather trials

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The Victorian Apiarists' Association Inc. (VAA)

Founded in 1892, the VAA is the peak body for beekeeping in Victoria.

The Association advocates to federal, state, and local governments to protect honeybee health, to improve Victoria's honey resources, and to ensure beekeepers' interests are safeguarded and promoted. We work to secure effective legislation and encourage scientific investigation and research in all aspects of beekeeping.

Our achievements include:

- Introducing the Victorian Apiary Code of Practice allowing bees to be kept in urban areas.
 - Contributing to the new Apiculture on Public Lands Policy through our involvement with the Buzz Committee.
 - Working with Plant Health Australia which contributed to the development of the Australian Biosecurity Code of Practice.
- The VAA advocates for the beekeeping industry on behalf of all beekeepers in Victoria.

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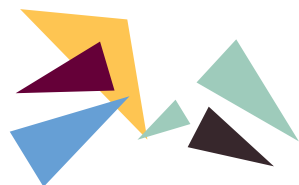
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All beekeepers and interested groups are welcome to join the VAA. Membership benefits include:

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- Access to the members-only section of the VAA website (www.vicbeekeepers.com.au).
- Discounts for VAA events.
- Access to individual beekeeper liability insurance with association discount.
- Voting rights at VAA regional group meetings and the annual VAA state conference.
- Opportunity to participate in and contribute to VAA subcommittees.
- 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.

Membership Rates:

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Partner membership is \$20 less in each category and includes all rights, except receipt of Journal.

Print subscription to the VAA *Australian Bee Journal* is \$50 per year (as from 1st June 2026).

HOW TO JOIN

Scan the QR code or visit
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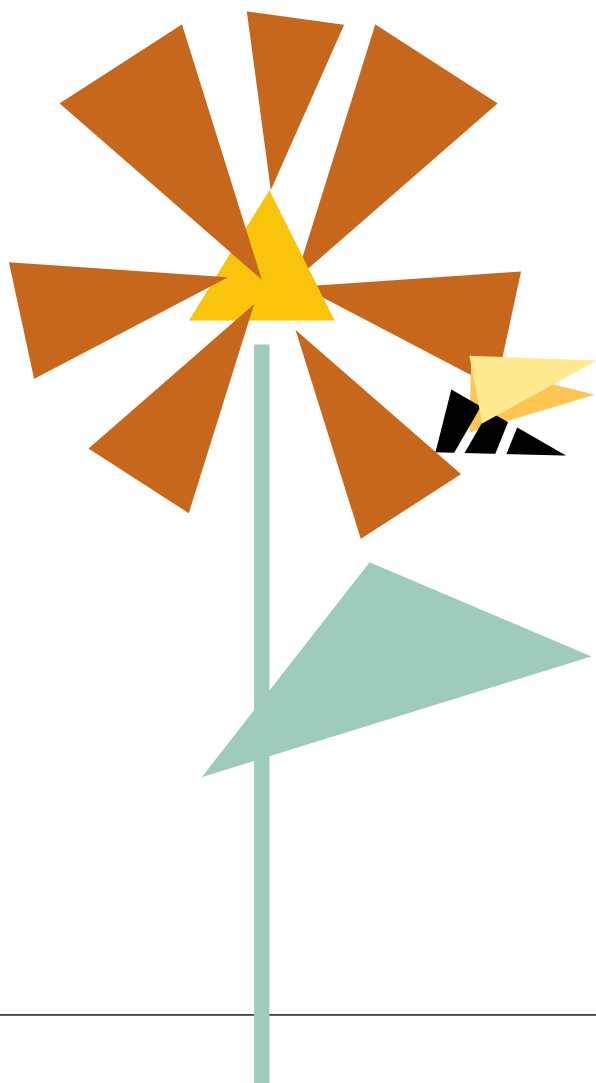
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Cover photo

John Wells, founding chairperson of the Bendigo Branch
VAA. Photography by Barry Robinson, Activist Pty Ltd.

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The VAA Australian Bee Journal seeks to publish contributions dealing with all aspects of beekeeping.

Deadline for copy is the last day of every month for the next month's issue.

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President's Report

Introducing our VAA Board

By Lindsay Callaway, President, Victorian Apiarists' Association



For this month's President's Report, I thought I would do something a little different and introduce you to the people who make up your VAA Board.

It's a diverse group, bringing together commercial and recreational beekeepers, science and research, education, biosecurity, business, governance, and industry experience from across Victoria. Between them, our Board members are connected with local branches and clubs, government, research organisations and industry bodies across Australia.

Most importantly, these people volunteer their time and bring their different skills, experiences and perspectives to the table for one reason: to work for Victorian beekeepers and help strengthen our industry and community.

So rather than another report from me this month, I'd like to introduce you to the people behind the VAA Board.



Andrew Wootton | Vice President | Melbourne

Andrew started beekeeping helping his father tend three hives in southwest London, eventually becoming his school's beekeeper by default. Now managing hives in Melbourne and raising queens, he has served on the VAA Board for three years, including two years as Vice President. He is deeply committed to biosecurity, with involvement in the State Quarantine Response Team (SQRT), the Victorian Bee Biosecurity Working Group, and the National Varroa Management Training Workshops. His latest initiative, the HiveMeet live streaming series, aims to strengthen the Victorian beekeeping community's preparedness for varroa. Andrew is also a Certified Master Beekeeper through the US-based Eastern Apiculture Society.



Mark Bichan | Mount Macedon

After more than 20 years of service across the New Zealand and Australian Defence Forces, Mark never imagined beekeeping would become such an important part of my life.

"After being diagnosed with PTSD, it was my family, together with the humble honeybee, that helped me rediscover purpose. I owe them both a debt I'll never fully repay."

He also contributes through his background in government, policy, strategic planning and governance, along with a willingness to roll up his sleeves and help take the lead with the VAA Victorian Bee Resilience Network initiative.

He joined the VAA Board to support Victorian beekeepers as we respond to varroa and the challenges ahead, and looks forward to meeting more members, learning from your experiences, and helping grow our beekeeping community.



Richard Collins | Bendigo

Richard is a third-generation apiarist and the director of Collins Honey in Bendigo, where he grew up surrounded by bees and the challenges of running a family business. Over the years, he has focused on innovation, sustainability and connecting directly with their customers, while building strong relationships with other local producers.

As a member of the VAA Board, Richard is keen to contribute to a stronger, more united voice for our industry, support practical policy change, and encourage the next generation of beekeepers. He co-led the planning committee for the VAA's record-breaking showing at the 2025 Melbourne Royal Show as well as the sponsorship campaign for the 2026 conference. He brings hands-on experience, a fresh outlook and a strong commitment to the future of Victorian beekeeping. This is Richard's second term on the VAA Board.



Olivia Ducommun-Dit-Verron | Melbourne

Olivia is a PhD candidate in the Agricultural Bio-Solutions Lab at La Trobe University, researching vaccine strategies and transgenerational immune priming in honey bees. Her goal is to develop a sustainable, single-dose vaccine against bacterial pathogens that fits seamlessly into current hive management.

Olivia manages hives both for her research and at home and enjoys being hands-on in the field and lab. She is passionate about combining science and practice, using research to equip beekeepers with practical tools and knowledge. By bridging research and real-world application, she seeks to drive industry innovation, leveraging her scientific expertise and fresh ideas. In the past year, Olivia held the VAA's non-voting position with AHBIC and has taken leadership roles on the 2026 conference planning committee and the VAA's Education Subcommittee, particularly in the area of education programming and social media communications.

"It's a diverse group, bringing together commercial and recreational beekeepers, science and research, education, biosecurity, business, governance, and industry experience from across Victoria."



Millie Enbom-Goad | Dunnstown (Ballarat)

A third-generation commercial beekeeper based on a farm in central Victoria, Millie has been keeping bees since age 15 and holds a science degree in Environmental Resource Management. She practises law in her spare time and is a passionate advocate for sustainable forest and land management. Her industry roles include president of the Central Victorian Apiarists' Association (CVAA) and member of the AgriFutures Honeybee and Pollination Advisory Panel and the Young Farmers Advisory Council. She is a past member of the VAA's Resources Subcommittee. A recent graduate of the Rural Women's Leadership Course, Millie is committed to building a resilient, evidence-based and environmentally conscious beekeeping industry in Victoria. This is Millie's second year on the VAA Board.



Stafford Kelly | Lockwood South (Bendigo)

Stafford Kelly grew up on a family farm in Inglewood where beekeeping was part of daily life. After completing a carpentry apprenticeship in Bendigo, he joined the Australian Army in 1981, serving across Australia and overseas until retiring in 2017. His military career spanned senior roles in education, training, personnel management, and operational planning. Returning to Bendigo, Stafford resumed beekeeping and has worked in a commercial apiary for nine years. He is currently chairperson of the VAA Bendigo Branch and its Board representative and serves on the Bendigo RSL Sub-Branch Board. He is passionate about education, peer inclusion, and building industry resilience.



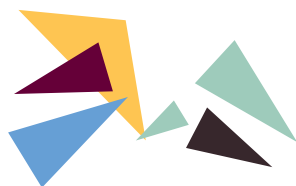
Monré Meyer | Melbourne

Based in Melbourne, Monré Meyer is a commercial beekeeper and co-founder of Pure Pollination, operating several hundred hives across Victoria and New South Wales. With a background in engineering leadership and risk management, he brings a systems-driven approach to hive health, pollination efficiency, biosecurity and operational excellence. Through Pure Pollination, Monré supports industry collaboration, education and the next generation of beekeepers, while also offering consulting services to recreational and beginner beekeepers. His work focuses on improving pollination outcomes, strengthening biosecurity, and raising awareness of honeybees' critical role in Australian food security and agricultural productivity.



Tony Wilsmore | Melbourne

Tony Wilsmore runs Suburban Bees, a small beekeeping business in Moonee Valley focused on honey, nucleus colonies, training, and advice, with a commitment to local, suburban and sustainable practice. Before beekeeping, he held senior roles in health and community services management and major infrastructure projects. Tony served as a Varroa Development Officer with AgVic and trainer for the National Varroa Mite Management Program. He is lead trainer and biosecurity officer for the Moonee Valley Beekeepers Club, a committee member of the VAA Melbourne Section and its representative to the VAA Board, a member of the VAA Education Committee, and this will be Tony's second year as a VAA Board member. Tony has also been a key organiser of the VAA's education program at the Melbourne Royal Show.



I will close on a sad note balanced with much gratitude. We recently learned of the passing of John Kennedy, long-time editor-at-large for the VAA Australian Bee Journal. His work over many years kept our association and our members connected to news, publications and events important to the beekeepers of Victoria. Vale John.



Lindsay Callaway

Lindsay Callaway
President
Victorian Apiarists'
Association

Experimenting with Formic Acid

By Randy Oliver, ScientificBeekeeping.com

Formic acid is the trickiest miticide to use in hot weather, so I continue to experiment with various application methods to improve its efficacy, and to better understand why it sometimes causes queen losses.

Last summer I ran several small “quick and dirty” preliminary experiments with formic acid; in this article I’ll share three of them.

Formic Vapours and their Distribution

Formic pad fumes, depending on the concentration of the acid, are denser than air (Table 1) and will thus tend to settle in a hive unless the bees actively fan them away.

Approximate molecular masses	
100% formic acid	46
85% formic acid	42
65% formic acid	36
50% formic acid	32
Air	29
Water vapor	18

Table 1. Notice that the more formic acid is diluted with water, the less dense is the mixture of their combination of vapours as they evaporate (they evaporate together at about the same rate).

Today, formic is generally applied above the brood nest, under the assumption that its fumes will tend to sink down across the brood. But back in the day, Canadian beekeeper Jean-Pierre Chapleau promoted applying formic on the bottom board. This got me wondering whether I could slip a single Formic Pro strip into the lower entrance, then seal that entrance and force the bees to use a temporary top entrance. My reasoning was that the formic fumes would tend to pool near the bottom of the hive, and slowly diffuse upwards into the brood area, where the bees would be forced to fan in fresh air from above. That might result in better distribution of the formic fumes throughout the hive.



Fig. 1 There were huge colony-to-colony differences in response across the board – some bearded up, others ignored the fumes! I took this photo a couple of hours after applying two strips of Formic Pro on the bottom boards.



Fig. 2 The next day, in two hives there were kills of 800 and 1000 bees. In others, there were no dead bees at all! Go figure ...

Experiment #1: Applying Formic Pro on the bottom board, with a temporary top entrance

So on a hot day in July I tried it on a double-deep hive having a starting mite wash count of 34. The colony took the treatment well, with few dead bees in evidence the next day, and a mite count after 24 hours of zero! Excitedly, I set up several more hives the same way, but found that the great reduction in mites in the first test was an anomaly – I’d need a stronger dose.

So I made up temporary hive covers with 19 × 76 mm openings, plus wedges to seal the lower entrances. I took starting mite wash counts from 13 hives in various conditions (mostly poor – since I didn’t want to sacrifice any “good” colonies), and replaced each hive cover with a ventilated lid. I then shoved a single Formic Pro strip into the entrance, and sealed the entrance with a wedge.

The formic vapours were thus “trapped” in the hive, and the bees needed to learn to use the top entrance for access and ventilation. The results were surprising (Figures 1–2).

Results: I’ll let you try to make sense of the results yourself (Table 2):

- Large colony-to-colony variability in response – some colonies tolerated the treatment, some didn’t!
- Clearly unacceptable adult bee kills in two hives.
- Good *average* mite reduction, but wildly inconsistent (compare hives 8 and 9).
- Surprisingly little queen loss.

We didn’t follow up on these colonies, but happened to perform mite washes on some of them about a month later (when prepping for another experiment). We were surprised by the number showing mite counts of zero at that time.

I followed up with another small experiment – allowing the bees a couple of days to get used to the top entrance before treatment – and plan to experiment more with the method.

Experiments on Queen Loss Due to Formic

Beekeepers often complain that application of formic acid in hot weather may result in the loss of some queens – especially if they are old or failing (the queens, not the beekeepers). But in our operation, we use that observation to our advantage. When we nuc up our colonies after almond pollination, we put the best-performing queens back into nucs for a second season. By late August, they apparently begin to run out of sperm, and their colonies naturally start to rear superscedure replacements. But there unfortunately aren’t enough drones around at that time for proper mating.

Luckily, by that time our last rounds of nucs have built up into strong singles – and need a second box of honey and brood. So we harvest most of the honey from the hives with second-year queens, and shake all the bees down into a single, along with their brood. We then hit that single with a strong formic treatment – typically in 35°C weather – in the hope of eliminating not only its mites, but its aged queen as well, so that we can then put that box of “clean” bees, brood, and honey on top of a single in need of stores for the winter.

OBSERVATION: *When we actually try to kill ageing queens with formic in hot weather, darned if half of them don’t just laugh at us.*

Formic on bottom board							
Hive ID	Start mites	24-hr mites	Queen	Strength	Adult kill	Brood kill	Notes
1	20	2	QR	med	light	light	
2	23	3	QR	med	no		
3	25	2	n/a	med	no		previously QL
4	26	17	QR	strong	some	no	
5	28	0	QR	med	no		previously QL
6	30	0	QR	strong	med		
7	30	3	?	weak		yes	previously QL?, depopulated
8	31	25	QR	strong	heavy		
9	32	0	QL?	med	heavy		
10	32	14	QR	strong	light		triple
11	38	2	QR	strong	no		
12	50	11	QR	strong	no		
13	50	23	QR	strong	light	some	
Mean	32	8					
% reduction	75						

Table 2. (QR=queenright; QL=queen lost)

This brings me back to a subject that I’ve written about previously¹ – is it the formic that actually kills queens, or do the formic fumes induce the workers to kill their mother? This question has bugged me since Dr Amrine posed it years ago.² So when some opportunities arose in September, I performed a couple of small experiments.

Experiment #2: Can you remove, and then reintroduce, the queen?

Based upon my finding that reducing the first-day flash off of fumes from Formic Pro pads pretty much eliminated queen loss,¹ I wanted to look more deeply into this phenomenon. I’ve noticed that after a day or so, the bees become acclimated to the odour (and irritation) of formic fumes and often walk right over the pads. So I wondered whether temporarily removing the queen during the initial flash-off and acclimation process, and then reintroducing her after a couple of days, might reduce the “queen loss problem.”

So I ran a small experiment, which I’ll go through step by step (Figures 3–4).

At noon two days later I returned with the queens. To my surprise and dismay, two had died, with their heads stuck to the candy (I have no idea why – their attendants were fine). The others all appeared to be healthy.

The ambient temperature was 24°C, with some guards fighting off [European wasps] and potential robbers at the entrances. I gave each hive two puffs of smoke, and allowed their queen to walk back into the entrance of her hive. (Some were reluctant to walk in, apparently in response to the odour of formic fumes emanating from the entrances.)

Once I’d reintroduced all the queens, I lifted the hive covers to measure the evaporation rate of the pads during reintroduction (~39 g/day). To my surprise, one queen was already being balled on the top bars.

A half hour later, I tipped up the boxes to inspect the bottom boards, and again looked under the lids. Three queens were being balled on the bottom boards (including the earlier one), so I recaged them each with one attendant and pushed their cages between two combs away from the fumes. Two other queens were being joyfully mobbed by their workers (one in a ball hanging from a bottom bar), but with no signs of aggression.

A half hour later I repeated the inspections. One queen was still being happily mobbed on the bottom board, and in another hive the bees were balling one dead worker and one [European wasp].

The next day, 24 hours after reintroduction, I repeated the inspections (including looking for dead queens in front of the hives). There was one worker being balled, but no signs of any queens dead or being balled. I re-inspected two days later. The three queens that I’d recaged due to balling were dead, but the rest were happily on the combs.

Results: Out of 10 queens, two died in the incubator, three were balled and eventually died in cages, and five were reaccepted during strong formic application. How’s that for another set of ambiguous results?

So I ran another experiment a few days later in another yard.

Experiment #3: Is it the formic or the bees that kill the queen?

The queen is the largest, best fed, and longest-lived bee in the hive. So why would she be more susceptible to formic fumes than would expendable workers? To see whether that was indeed the case, I exposed some queens and workers, side by side, to exactly the same formic fumes.

By now it was late [March]. I set up ten hives with second-year queens in single deeps containing 8–9 frames covered with bees. I caught and marked the queens, then placed them in push-in cages midway down a comb, off centre, but below a fresh formic pad.



Fig. 3 The test hives were all single deeps with 9–10 frames of bees. After I pulled the queens, I applied recycled Miteaway II pads charged with 50% formic acid (which applies an acceptably strong dose to a single), in a 38 mm rim.³ This photo was taken at noon a day and a half later, during which the average evaporation rate was 35 grams per day. Note that by this time the bees were well acclimated to the fumes.



Fig. 4 Three colonies aggressively balled their queens, which I rescued, recaged, and placed between two combs of bees.

“Formic is a great choice in early spring, since you can use it to create a short brood break to reduce swarming, and if a queen should be lost, the colony can easily rear a replacement at that time of season.”

The cages were placed over comb with no brood inside, but with open nectar (so that the queen would not be dependent upon the workers to feed her), and with 3 workers as attendants. All cages were placed facing a comb of brood, so that the caged bees would remain within the cluster. I applied MiteAway II formic pads in early afternoon, made with 50% formic, in a 38 mm rim. Temperature was ~27°C.

After several days, the formic had evaporated from the pads, and I inspected the cages to see how the caged queens and workers made out.

Results: Eight out of ten queens survived and looked fine. But in the cages of the two that died, the attendants were still alive. So some queens do appear to be more susceptible to formic fumes than are workers. **But 8 out of 10 presumably old queens tolerated being trapped beneath a strong formic treatment just fine.**

Discussion

Formic acid has some very desirable qualities as a mite treatment:

- It is fast acting (you can eliminate most all the mites in a hive overnight with a strong flash treatment).
- A strong dose can penetrate the cappings.
- It doesn't contaminate the combs or honey.

But it also has its downsides:

- In hot weather it may induce queen loss – although I'm still not clear whether the majority of those losses are directly due to the fumes, or instead from being balled by their daughters. (Covering the upper side of Formic Pro strips with their wrapper will largely eliminate queen loss in hot weather.)
- Formic also exhibits great hive-to-hive variability in efficacy when it's hot.

Formic is a great choice in early spring, since you can use it to create a short brood break to reduce swarming, and if a queen should be lost, the colony can easily rear a replacement at that time of season. But later in the season, due to lack of drones in my area, I'm concerned that any replacement emergency queens might not get properly mated.

Anyway, formic's been used for many years, especially in Europe and Canada (where there is a greater choice of approved application methods). I can only hope that now that the US EPA has spoken [that they won't crack down on beekeepers using certain generic substances^{4,5}], that our state regulators will allow us to experiment with the generic liquid more freely.

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Citations and Notes:

1. Oliver, R (2022) Formic Pro and queens in hot weather. *American Bee Journal*, September 2022.
<https://scientificbeekeeping.com/formic-pro-and-queens-in-hot-weather/>
2. Amrine Jr, J, & R Noel (2006) Formic acid fumigator for controlling varroa mites in honey bee hives. *International Journal of Acarology* 32(2): 115–124.
3. This is not an approved method for varroa control, but since I was not applying the formic for pesticidal purposes, it was not against the law.
4. <https://scientificbeekeeping.com/good-news-from-the-epa/>
5. <https://epa.gov/pesticides/epa-issues-advisory-pesticides-used-control-varroa-mites-beehives-including-coordinated>



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Infrared aerial photograph of a 1987 heavy-thinning treatment, Tanjil Bren. Credit: Centre for Forest Tree Technology

We revisited a forest experiment that lay forgotten for 30 years. What we found was astounding

From *The Conversation*

What's the best way to manage a forest? Australians have argued about this for decades. The debate is often framed as binary: do we protect forests entirely, or harvest trees to support local economies and communities?

The reality is more interesting, as our new research on a long-forgotten experiment in Victoria's mountain ash forests reveals.

Since the 1970s, scientists and the public have questioned the use of clearfell logging – where all trees in a block of forest are cut down. Conservationists argued it destroys habitat for rare species and reduces the forests' ecological value. Foresters said mountain ash is adapted to catastrophic bushfires, and clearfelling is the forestry equivalent.

The argument was heated and the polarisation unhelpful. But the underlying questions about the impacts of clearfelling, and how they compared to less intensive forestry options, remained unresolved.



Aerial views of the Tanjil Bren Silvicultural Systems Project. L: Small cleared patches varying in size (50–140 metres wide) and shape (square vs. rectangular). R: Heavy thinning. Centre for Forest Tree Technology

A landmark experiment

In the mid-1980s, the Victorian government launched a major restructure of the timber industry, and invested today's equivalent of A\$26 million to explore alternatives to clearfelling. This would use silviculture, the branch of forestry that deals with establishing, growing and tending forests.

The Silvicultural Systems Project was established at two sites between 1987 and 1989: Tanjil Bren in Victoria's Central Highlands, and Cabbage Tree Creek in East Gippsland.

It was a landmark experiment, comparing forest regeneration across the full range of silvicultural approaches. These included traditional clearfells (250–350 metres wide), small patch clearfells (50–140m wide), and heavy thinnings, where 50–70% of trees were cut. Extensive areas of unharvested forest were kept as benchmarks for comparison.

The forest at Tanjil Bren was dense mountain ash regrowth from the 1939 fires. Hundreds of survey plots were established and thousands of seedlings were monitored. By the early 2000s, the results were clear: mountain ash regenerated best on clearfell sites. Where tall canopy trees were retained or the cleared patches were small, common understorey species such as acacia dominated.

The findings were published. The access road grew over. The project sign collapsed. The experiment was forgotten. The debates continued.

But the trees kept growing.

Astounding results

In 2014 we visited the Tanjil Bren site as part of a University of Melbourne subject on silviculture in native forests. A colleague, Simon Murphy, had been involved in its establishment and suggested our students see the long-term outcomes of different silvicultural systems side by side. What we found was astounding.

The original results still held: 30 years later, the mountain ash in the large cleared patches and clearfelled areas was vigorous and abundant. But it was the heavily thinned parts of the forest that really caught our attention.

The trees left behind after thinning were enormous. While they were only 80 years old, the largest averaged well over a metre in diameter at chest height, and some were more than 1.5m. Thinning had given these trees more space and resources to grow, and they had responded dramatically. The largest trees in the thinned stands were 20% bigger in diameter than those in the unharvested control areas.

More remarkable still: the thinned stands of trees had stored as much or more carbon in their wood than the unharvested control areas. In just 30 years, the heavily thinned forest had not only recovered all the carbon removed during harvesting, but had also gained enough additional carbon to equal the increase seen in the unharvested controls.

These findings have profound implications. Bigger trees are more resistant to fires, so when the next fire occurs, they are more

likely to survive. Bigger trees are also more likely to form hollows – a critical and declining habitat for rare species such as the greater glider and Leadbeater’s possum.

The acacia trees that grew in most of the silvicultural treatments are also vital for Leadbeater’s possums, which use it to forage and move around the forest. Camera traps across the sites confirmed this: Leadbeater’s possums were found in every silvicultural treatment plot we surveyed – but none of the unharvested areas.

Lessons for the future

The Tanjil Bren SSP offers three important lessons.

First, long-term silvicultural experiments are irreplaceable. Australia’s forests contain many forgotten experiments that could transform our understanding of how forests respond to human intervention. But all too often, they end up neglected, unfunded and forgotten. We should find them before it is too late.

Second, forest thinning is not a trade-off. Our findings show this for mountain ash, and other studies in North America have shown this for conifer forests. It can deliver wood for local industry, absorb carbon and improve habitat for wildlife. It is a win-win outcome that challenges the false dichotomy of conservation versus production that has dominated public debate for decades.

While thinning cannot (and should not) be done everywhere, it may be a useful tool to create more variety in tree ages and sizes, particularly in forests impacted by clearfelling or high-severity fire.

Third, and perhaps most importantly: there is no silvicultural silver bullet for managing forests. The long-forgotten experiment at Tanjil Bren has taught us that there are options available for managing our forests beyond clearfelling that can contribute to the societal demand for wood, maintain carbon stocks, and conserve biodiversity.

Authors: Kaitlyn Hammond, Postdoctoral fellow, University of Northern The University of Melbourne; Patrick Baker, Director of the AFWI Centre for Climate Smart Forestry and Professor of Silviculture and Forest Ecology, The University of Melbourne; and Raphael Trouve, Senior Research Fellow in Forest Dynamics and Statistical Modelling, The University of Melbourne.

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Detecting Varroa by Sound

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The original paper is behind a paywall but can be found as Yildiz, et al., (2026). “When the hive speaks: detecting Varroa destructor infestation in honey bees through acoustic biomarkers and machine learning.” *Experimental and Applied Acarology* 97. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10493-026-01179-y>

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AHBIC CEO Report — September 2026

Danny LeFeuvre, CEO

The last two months have seen AHBIC taking the pressures facing beekeepers directly to government, while continuing the practical work on treatment access, pollination and the Australian Colony Loss Survey. As spring gets underway, the cost of keeping colonies healthy and getting them ready for the next job remains front and centre. These are the issues we are bringing to every discussion about the future of our industry.

Taking our case to Canberra

A highlight this month was meeting with the federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Julie Collins, and the Shadow Minister, Darren Chester, at Parliament House on 7 September. These meetings were an opportunity to put the realities facing beekeeping businesses directly before both sides of politics and seek a coordinated national response.

Our message was straightforward. Beekeepers are carrying substantial additional treatment and labour costs, managing colony losses and trying to maintain the strong hives that Australian agriculture relies on. The consequences extend well beyond honey production. When a beekeeping business loses capacity or leaves the industry, the growers who depend on its pollination services are also exposed.

We took practical requests to Canberra: targeted, time-limited assistance with varroa treatment costs; stronger action on imported-honey authenticity and the assessment of deformed wing virus risks; and clear responsibility within the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry for progressing the national roundtable actions. Access to effective and affordable treatments remains central to that discussion.

With Darren Chester, I also stressed the need for bipartisan support. Beekeepers need governments to work together on solutions that can be delivered, with clear responsibilities and timeframes. Following the meeting, I provided his office with a further briefing on the pressures facing the industry and the implications for pollination and food production.

Getting these issues in front of the Minister and her shadow counterpart matters, but the measure of success will be what changes for beekeepers. We will continue pressing for practical support and keep members informed as those discussions progress.

Following through on the roundtable

The Decision Makers Forum on 28 July considered the 11 priority actions developed through the national honey bee industry roundtable process. Industry and research partners committed to progressing work, including treatment coordination and better information on pollination supply and demand. Disappointingly, governments did not bring forward the additional commitments we had sought to match the scale of the problem.

The work has continued through discussions with state associations, governments, research partners and pollination-dependent industries. The roundtable has given us a common set of practical requests to take into those discussions, including the Canberra meetings. Our focus is on turning that shared position into help that reaches beekeeping businesses.

Varroa treatment access

Treatment cost, availability and performance continue to take up a significant part of our work. AHBIC has remained engaged on permits, registrations and access to chemicals, including discussions

in September. We are pressing for workable regulatory pathways and clearer coordination so beekeepers have a wider range of suitable options.

We are also taking the industry's research needs back to AgriFutures. Beekeepers need evidence about how treatments perform under Australian conditions, what different management approaches cost, and how to interpret resistance testing alongside what is happening in their hives. Research needs to lead to guidance that can be used in a commercial operation. These priorities formed part of the update we have prepared for the Honey Bee and Pollination Advisory Panel.

Pollination and honey market integrity

The almond season has brought further concerns about the availability of suitable colonies and how hive strength is assessed. AHBIC has taken up concerns about hive audits and continued discussions with the crop industries that rely on managed pollination. Growers need confidence in the service they are buying, and beekeepers need clear, fair and consistent expectations.

We still do not have a complete national picture of pollination supply or colony losses. Reports from individual businesses are valuable, but they cannot tell us the size of the problem across the country. Better information will help us explain the pressures on pollination businesses and make a stronger case for investment and support.

Imported honey remains another priority. We met with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry in August on honey authenticity and have continued pursuing the biosecurity questions around Deformed Wing Virus in imported honey. These are separate but equally important issues: Australian beekeepers should be able to compete in a market where honey is what it claims to be, and import conditions need to properly consider risks to our bees.

Australian Colony Loss Survey

Bianca Giggins has been leading the detailed work to get the Australian Colony Loss Survey ready, working with Pike Stahlmann-Brown on the questionnaire and programming, and Cooper Schouten at Southern Cross University on the ethics process. The survey has progressed through design and testing, with further information now being provided for ethics review. It will open once the necessary approval and participant information are in place.

This is an important piece of work for the industry. We need a more consistent picture of colony losses and management practices so that our discussions with governments and researchers are backed by better evidence. When the survey opens, I encourage beekeepers to make time to contribute, whether your losses have been high, low or somewhere in between. A broad response will make the results more useful. Join the COLOSS mailing list.

The wider industry work

Alongside the immediate varroa pressures, work continues on levy reform, including the ballot arrangements and communications needed to explain the proposal to beekeepers. There is still preparation to complete before the industry is asked to vote. It is important that people understand what is proposed and have a fair opportunity to have their say. Take a deep dive on levy information on our dedicated industry levy page.



We have also continued contributing to the review of the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed, the national agreement that sets out how plant pest emergencies are managed and funded. The experience of varroa needs to inform how future responses work for our industry. Workforce discussions and our submission on the classification of beekeeping occupations are another part of this less visible work, aimed at ensuring the skills and needs of beekeeping are properly recognised.

Read the rest
of the most
recent AHBIC
update at:



The month ahead

Over the coming month, our priorities will be following up the Canberra discussions, progressing treatment access and the roundtable actions, and getting the colony loss survey ready to open. We will also continue the levy reform preparations and discussions with research partners about the work that will make the greatest practical difference to beekeepers.

Thank you to the state associations, our Executive and the many beekeepers who continue to share their experiences with Bianca and I. That information helps us keep the national work grounded in what is happening in the paddock. I hope spring provides some welcome opportunities, your bees build well, and you travel safely through the busy months ahead. Please keep looking out for each other.

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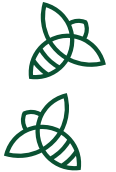
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Bogaert et al., Proc. Roy. Soc. B (2025) • Kulhanek et al., Insects (2026).

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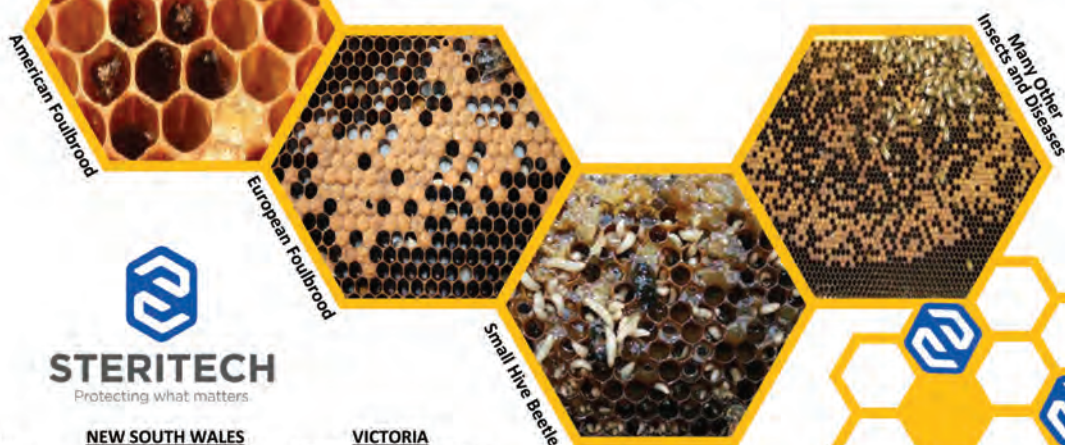
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Webcasts and Podcasts



Victorian Apiarists' Association
HiveMeet October 2026.
Going Viral: Tracking Varroa
Driven Virus Shifts in Australia.



VAA HiveMeet,
October 1st –
Dr John Roberts talks
about tracking varroa
driven virus shifts
in Australia

North Carolina beekeeper Greg Rogers
dives into the question of which brood nest
configuration is best. Includes tons of ideas
and suggestions for all beekeepers including
beginner, intermediate and commercial.



Bob Binnie –
Which Brood
Chamber Is Best?

In this episode of Two Bees in a Podcast,
Amy Vu and Dr. Jamie Ellis conduct an
extended Q&A segment on laying workers,
pseudo-queens and pesticide exposure.

Two Bees in a Podcast –
Laying Workers,
Pseudo-Queens and
Pesticide Exposure



Beekeeping challenges rarely stop at
national borders. This week, Jeff and Becky
cross the Atlantic for a conversation with
Dr. Andrea Quigley and Norman Carreck.

Beekeeping Today –
Conversation with
Beekeeper's Quarterly



Varroa Mites Escape the Evolutionary Trap of Haplodiploidy

It was previously believed that male varroa mites, like honey bees, only received one set of genes (were "haploid") which exacerbated the already extreme inbreeding caused by their usual mating with their sisters. Eliash et al followed 30 mite families over three generations and sequenced the whole genome of 223 individual mites. What they discovered is that the male mites retained both sets of their mother's genes (diploid arrhenotoky). While the females have one set of genes from their father and one from their mother, the males have two sets from their mother. The male passes a random half of his genes to his daughters.

This slows down the loss of genetic variation and increases the "effective population size," which in a species that has gone through evolutionary bottlenecks both in host jumping and geographic spread is very relevant.

Haplodiploidy had been referred to as an evolutionary trap because once male-haplodiploidy develops there's no evolutionary pressure for them to become diploid again. Varroa somehow developed from having fully haploid males (as most of its sister species do) to this "functional diploidiploidy."

As you will know in bees any unfertilized egg becomes male and any fertilized egg becomes female. It is unknown what determines whether a varroa egg develops into a male or female, though unmated females can still lay male eggs.

This finding is particularly relevant to the development of resistance in varroa mites. Under pure haplodiploidy the genes are bottlenecked through males every generation, limiting the preservation of recessive genes. This newly discovered mechanism changes that dynamic. As to specifically how, good or bad, that is beyond the scope of this short summary.

Read the original paper:
Eliash et al. (2026) "Varroa Mites Escape
the Evolutionary Trap of Haplodiploidy"
Nature Communications 17: 10392.



■ Round and Round with Varroa

by Lindsay Callaway

There is no longer a varroa season – just the next lap. A year after the mite's arrival, commercial beekeeper Lindsay Callaway shares the whiteboard circles that map almonds, honey flows, queen rearing and treatments across twelve months. With resistance confirmed in Victoria, he explains why monitoring must lead, young queens matter, and why every beekeeper should draw their own circle.



■ Monthly Diary: September 2026

by John Edmonds

Canola is flowering, but the hive scales aren't climbing. In his September diary, John Edmonds tracks a stop-start spring across southern Victoria: cold southerlies, early queen cells, swarming, and a parade of spring blossoms.



■ Monthly Report: Bendigo Branch

by Jamie Trimby

With real mites in the club apiary, hands-on Spring Management training deals directly with mite control as well as swarm management.



■ You Can Just Do Things: Informal Bee Clubs

by Kris Fricke

No committee, no minutes, no problem. When Kris Fricke moved to the village of Birregurra, a Facebook post and a booked hall grew into a thriving beekeeping group that met monthly at members' properties for hive inspections and barbecues. He shares how to start a relaxed local club in your own patch, and why a little informality might be exactly what your neighbours are buzzing for.



■ Club Spotlight: Geelong Beekeeping Club

by Nathan Whitford

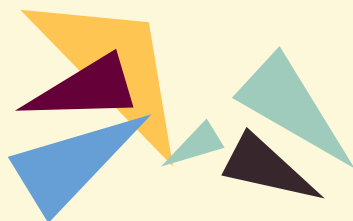
The many active beekeepers of the Geelong region are served by a flourishing club built by many dedicated volunteers. No two clubs are exactly alike and the Geelong club has interesting and successful programs worth emulating.



■ Book Review: Buckfast Bees

by Gill Greenstein

Regular book reviewer Gill Greenstein reviews a book about the fascinating man behind the famous Buckfast strain of bees, Brother Adam.



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Chair: Stafford Kelly
Email: bbvaachair@gmail.com

Treasurer: Michael St.Clair
Email: bbvaatreasurer@outlook.com

Meetings: 1st Wednesday of each month (except Jan & Dec). Dinner at 6.00pm (optional). Meeting at 7.00pm. Location: Lakeside Hotel, Bendigo. Please register with the Secretary to attend.

Melbourne Section:

Chair: Sue Ditchfield
Secretary: Gill Greenstein
0422 058 180
Email: vaamelbournesection@hotmail.com
www.vicbeekeepers.com.au/Melbourne-Section

Meetings: Last Thursday of each month (except December). Meeting at 7.00pm. Location: Church of Christ, 1 The Avenue, Surry Hills.

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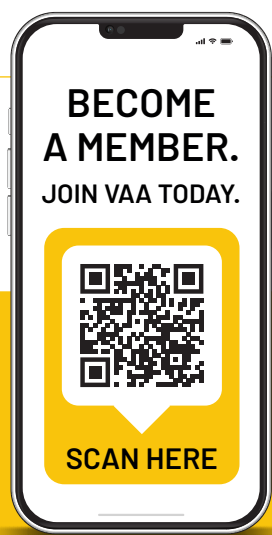
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Secretary: Theresa Brown

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Meetings: 3rd Thursday of each month.

Location: NewHope Baptist Church,

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Central Victorian Apiarists' Association Inc.

Millie Enbom-Goad

0400 083 582

Email: cva_inc@outlook.com

Geelong Beekeepers Club

President: Nathan Whitford

0403 807 224

Email: info@geelongbeekeepersclub.org.au

Meetings: 3rd Friday of each month.

Location: Belmont Masonic Centre,

25 Regent Street, Belmont

Gippsland Apiarists' Association Inc.

President: Stan Glowacki

0413 136 878

Email: jeeralangapiary@bigpond.com

Secretary: Lorraine Glowacki

0402 026 111

Email: secretarygaa1966@gmail.com

J Beekeeping Club Inc.

Secretary: Kevin O'Sullivan

0400 667 125

Email: enquiries@jbeekeeping.org

Meetings: 2nd Tuesday of each month

(Except January). Meeting at 7.00pm.

Location: Goonawarra Community Centre,

20 Dornoch Drive, Sunbury, VIC 3429.

Latrobe Valley Beekeepers Assoc.

President: Sean-Paul Smith

0466 041 199

Email: LatrobeValleyBees@gmail.com

Meetings: 1st Tuesday of each month.

Meeting at 7.00pm. Location: Old Moe

Netball Courts, 99 Savages Road, Moe.

Melbourne Beekeepers Club Inc.

Secretary: Anita Conroy

Email:

secretary@melbournebeekeepersclub.org.au

www.melbournebeekeepersclub.org.au

Mornington Peninsula

Beekeepers Association

Vice-President: Bryannah Downward

0401 965 558

Email: admin@mpba.org.au

Meetings: 4th Wednesday of each month

(except June and December). Meeting at

7.00pm. Location: Mornington Park Pavilion,

9 Flinders Drive, Mornington, VIC 3931.

Moonee Valley Beekeepers Club Inc.

Secretary: Paul Kucera

Email: mvbbeekeepersclub@gmail.com

Meetings: 2nd Tuesday of each month (except

January). Meeting at 7.30pm. Location: Hall,

195 Holmes Rd, Moonee Ponds, VIC 3039.

North Eastern Apiarists' Association Inc.

Secretary: Moss McCallum

Email: secretary.neaa@gmail.com

Northwestern Bee Club Inc.

President: Roger Mitchell

0407 427 431

Email: northwesternbeeclub@gmail.com

www.nwbeeclub.store

South Gippsland Beekeepers Inc.

Secretary: Anna Jones

0411 770 062

Email: secretary@sgbeekeepers.org.au

www.southgippslandbeekeepers.org.au

Meetings: 2nd Thursday of each month.

Location: St Peters Anglican Church Hall, cnr

McCartin Street & Bruce Street, Leongatha

Southside Beekeepers Club

Secretary: Ted Cottle

0428 429 547

Email: ted@southsidebeekeepers.com.au

Meetings: 2nd Thursday of each month.

Meeting at 7.30pm. Location: Monterey

Secondary College, 21 Silvertop Street,

Frankston North, VIC 3200.

WerriBeeks Inc.

President: Marthinus Noyce

Email: info@werribeeks.org.au

Meetings: 3rd Monday of each month.

Meeting at 7.00pm. Location: Wyndham Park

Community Centre, 55/57 Kookaburra Avenue,

Werribee.

www.werribeeks.org.au

Woodend Bee-Friendly Society

An action group of the Macedon Ranges

Sustainability Group

Action Group Lead: Matthew Croatto

Email: wbfs@mrsg.org.au

www.mrsg.org.au/beekeeping

Meetings: 3rd Sunday of each month (except

December). Meeting at 3.00pm. Location:

Woodend Neighbourhood House, 47 Forest

Street, Woodend, VIC 3442.

If any contact details or information
on these pages is incorrect please
advise the editor.

Email: abjeditor@vicbeekeepers.com.au



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Corowa, NSW 2646.
Contact: Steve or Jodie Goldsworthy
Phone: 02 6033 2322

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Contact: Moe Jarrad
Mobile: 0438 7465 01
Email: majarrad@gmail.com
www.beemanhoney.com.au

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Maryborough, VIC 3465.
Contact: Stephen Covey
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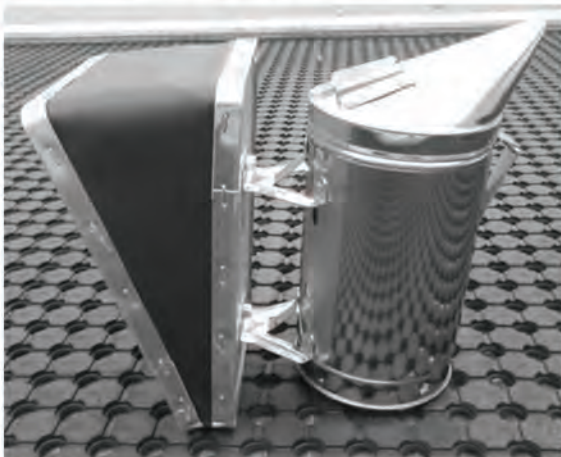
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