

BEEBIZ APRIL 2020

The Newsletter of the Northern Rivers Amateur Beekeeping Association Inc.

<u>President</u>	Kevin Virgen	02 6684 9213	northernrivers.president@beekeepers.asn.au
<u>Vice President</u>	Ray Smith	0427 734 954	northernrivers.biosecurity@beekeepers.asn.au
<u>Secretary</u>	Brian Window	0466 790 736	northernrivers.secretary@beekeepers.asn.au
<u>Treasurer</u>	Paul Towner	0418 321 305	northernrivers.treasurer@beekeepers.asn.au
<u>Committee Member</u>	Geoff Manning	0400 221 602	podargus@ycw.com.au
<u>Membership Officer and Editor</u>	Brian Window		

Postal Address 54 Donnans Road, Lismore Heights, NSW 2078

President Report

‘Bees are like oxygen ; ubiquitous, essential, and for the most part, unseen- but they lie at the heart of relationships that bind the human and natural worlds.’

Hi Folks!

As apiarists, it is nothing new to us to have to sterilize, isolate, irradiate and use all methods at our disposal to minimize pathogens in our apiaries. We have been doing this for 20 -30 years. So now we have to do it in the human population also. With no meetings, no field days, no social events to attend I have found time to do some of those gunna-do jobs such as repair and repaint those old supers that have been laying in the shed for years. Hopefully, next Spring will be kinder to us weather-wise, we will get a big build up in hive populations and all our rejuvenated woodware will be most useful. When we are able to have our next field day is an unknown at this point in time but when the authorities relax the shutdown we will be able to get back on track.

Well, hope you all had a happy as well as a quiet Easter.

Cheers Kevin Virgen

Secretary Report

What is there to report? What an amazing situation we are in?

If anyone has any suggestions how we can satisfy our members needs for social interaction as well as supplying information about beekeeping, let me know. I will do my best as secretary and editor (we are still looking for an editor, so contact me or Kevin if interested).

The last meeting was to be about requeening hives, so a series is started in this newsletter concentrating on how to find the queen. The techniques are based on many years of experience garnered from the internet. The other series which has fortuitously come my way is how to remove bees from a bird box, and suggestions will be sought from club members about how to proceed at various stages. Please cooperate and help, as many of these situations require lateral thinking.

Brian

Update on Last Field Day

Last field day at Rous Mill was unfortunately cancelled due to the steps to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Flowering Report

No real change in prospects this month. Red Gum and Grey Ironbark will be all the go, starting in May. As I have said Red Gum will give good pollen and the Grey Ironbark almost always yields honey. Red Gum sometimes gives honey, its budding is quite spectacular this season.

Lilly Pilly has been having a number of flowerings. Common along some watercourses, it is also widely planted. It can give a bit of a dribble of nectar if there is enough of it in range. The pollen also seems useful although it has not been tested. A well-known commercial beekeeper reported a good flow from them at Boat Harbour on one occasion. Quandong is similar in that there is a bit of nectar available from the bell shaped flowers. It also tends to be growing along watercourses. The only ones I know of being planted are at Bunnings on the way out of the car park. They are flowering as I write. I am not sure if they are the same species. Quandong seeds are or were used as the pieces in Chinese checkers, at least when I was a kid. The hard seed is very wrinkled. They were in this instance from the outback being somewhat bigger than our one. Here it is sometimes called Blue Fig. The timber in the past was used for butter making implements as it doesn't taint the butter. There is a huge butter churn on display at Uki. Saplings were also used for hoe handles, being an ideal shape for the purpose.

The bad news is that there has been a major flowering of Ragweed. The yellow pollen is worse than useless. The plant is wind pollinated. That alone does not make it poor quality, some wattles also a wind pollinated plant can be good quality. Unfortunately none that grow on the coast. Another wind pollinated tree flowering at the moment is She-oak. But in this case it is the one that grows along watercourses and is poor quality, unlike the Hill Oak that grows more or less where its name suggests is good. The bees collect a husk with the pollen and discard it when eating the pollen. It looks like sawdust in front of the hive or can build up on the floor of the hive if it is sloping backwards a tad.

Goldenrod grows in small patches around the country, all as far as I have seen on growing road verges. How it got started I have no idea, it doesn't seem to spread or get through the fence. A native in the USA, it is an important Autumn source for the bees. One of the Cassias is having a go now. Some Cassias are important for the native solitary bees but honeybees seem to mostly ignore them.

Stay at home except to attend to the bees. Or to buy toilet paper. Geoff

(Editor comment.

Geoff last year pointed this goldenrod out to me, and they are flowering again this year. They are on the right just out of Lismore on the Bangalow Road along the fence line at the entrance to Lagoon Grass Road. Golden Rod (solidago, various types) is a flowering weed important to beekeepers in the USA.



Bees were busy on these; there is one possibly two on the plant shown. Apparently, the honey has an unpleasant aroma, but is valued by beekeepers for stores to boost the hives before winter.

It is a plant that is important to herbalists, and maybe the source of this patch can be attributed to someone who wants it for that purpose. I suspect that it is a weed and should be eradicated.)

Finding Queens Part One

Finding queens in beehives is something which needs to be done occasionally; generally, in assessing the health of a hive it is sufficient to just look at the brood (amount of brood, brood pattern, presence of eggs, larvae and capped brood, absence of disease etc). In fact, beekeepers learn little more by looking at the queen.

Finding queens in beehives is something where practice counts for a lot; most experienced beekeepers could not tell you what makes the queen stand out, but it is probably a combination of the large pointy abdomen, the different colouring, and the different way she moves over the frame. Virgin and poor queens are often small, and the pointy abdomen is a helpful feature. Some practice can be had by looking at frames with queens shown on the net; try googling “Pictures of queen bees on the frame”.

In what follows, the editor makes some comments in italics.



Frame from Ross Wood

Preliminaries

Before starting, some decisions have to be made.

- It is always useful to have an empty brood box handy.
- Despite your having requeened the hive some time in the past, it is very likely that it has requeened itself since then (*This is very obvious if you buy marked queens; most of the time they are gone, but they leave behind their genes*). If inspection of the brood while searching shows this queen to be performing well, you may decide to keep her to use later. So have a queen cage handy to put the old queen in.
- Prepare for the eventuality that you do not find her. How long will the new queen last in the queen cage? Should you make up a nucleus? Do you have more hives to requeen than new queens?
- Searching can be made easier by the **Disarming** procedure described later, but this would normally be used only by beginners or for vicious hives, as it slows things down.

Searching the Frames

- Use smoke sparingly; a couple of puffs is enough. Too much smoke stirs up the hive.
 - Remove supers and excluder and set aside. Check that there is no brood in the super.
 - Start either in the middle and move out alternately, or start with the two outside frames and move in. In either case, lever the frames away to obtain plenty of clearance for the one that you are removing, and scrape off any burr comb on the top bars that might interfere with the frame sliding out. Put the frames in the spare box in the order they are in the hive.
- The first approach recognises that the queen on average will be towards the centre of the hive, and the second approach keeps the queen away from the side walls with the well-lit gaps.
- Work quite quickly as the queen does not like the light and may leave the frame for the bottom or the walls. Do not try to do any other task at the same time.
 - As you pull the frame to be examined out, look at the face of the next frame where you may see her because of her larger size (*Some have quoted a 20% success rate for this, but it has never worked for me*).
 - Always inspect the frame over the hive in case the queen drops off.
 - Scan near the bottom bar of the frame first, as it was in the dark. Scan up the side, along the top, and down the other side. Scan back and forward across the middle. Flip the frame over while scanning the bottom bar and repeat on the other side (*With practice, the eye and the brain collude to find the queen, and then tell you!*)
 - Glance at the walls and the bottom as you proceed.
 - If you do not find her on the first pass, check the walls and the floor as best you can. A table to lift the hive up to a comfortable height will help. If she is not found on a second pass, suggest that the task be abandoned for the day.
 - If you see the queen, keep an eye on her until you dispose of her or cage her.
 - While putting the frames back, shake the bees off, check for disease, manipulate combs, lift honey up etc. Introduce the new queen in her cage.

Next two issues of BeeBiz will cover **Disarming, Pairing, Divide and Conquer, Straining and Last Resort**. (Much of this comes from South Gippsland Beekeepers)

From the Hives March 2020

It has been a very poor year for beekeeping. The 32 hives that are migrated around the Northern Rivers are sitting at Coraki on a tea tree site waiting for some flowers. Looking at my notes, the last time honey was extracted from these hives was when they came off the macadamias at the end of October. So over the five months of Spring/Summer, they have accumulated little; they probably had more honey at the start than they have now.

Most of this can be put down to the bad drought last year, some of it can be attributed to the fires, and some of it to the heavy rain which broke the drought. The grass grew so rapidly and densely, so as to choke out a lot of the smaller weeds one would expect to supply the varied pollens required for healthy bees. The usual fields of fireweed are not around this year.

A few hives have been robbed out, presumably due to the number of bees in those hives decreasing with a weakening queen. At this time, the brood and level of stores are being inspected, and the sugar shake test will be performed on a couple of hives. For the first time on the Northern Rivers, I will have to look seriously at feeding some hives to get them through winter. Brian

Sugar Shake Month

All beekeepers registered in NSW will have been informed that April is Sugar Shake Month, when the beekeeper has to collect half a cup of bees and treat them to a bath of icing sugar. The secretary has been

supplied with 20 sugar shake kits (large plastic bottle with mesh lid, icing sugar, spoon and instruction sheet) and they are available to be picked up at his home at 54 Donnans Road, Lismore Heights.

Because the number are limited, club members are asked to return the kits to the secretary, who will then sterilise them for the next user.

These tests involve the beekeeper in little work, and should be done by all at this time. While it is easy to say it is a waste of time because we do not have varroa, and if it did enter Australia, it would be through a significant port, not through the Northern Rivers, regard it as practice for the day hopefully far in the future when it does enter Australia. So **JUST DO IT.**

Bees in Bird Box



This is a fairly common problem in our area, particularly where macadamias are grown. Most hives moved into the macadamia in Spring benefit from the flush of Spring flowering in this warm area, as well as the macadamias, and drastic action is needed to stop them swarming.

The photos show a hive in a bird box. The box was intended for king parrots, but like many homes on the red soil is big enough for many occupants. Actually, those of you who have read David Seely's book, "Honey Bee Democracy" (in library) will recognise it as about optimum size for a bee swarm to move in.

It is screwed to the tree, and it should be possible to remove it. There are holes around the landing cylinder, which can probably be sealed by tape, and the landing cylinder can probably be sealed by gauze. If it is full of honey, it will be heavy, but can surely be lowered on to a utility.

Now the question is how to get the queen bee out alive, and the honey out. I intend to take it home and rope it to a post while I assess any suggestions. It has a lid from which the combs would have been hung by the bees, but because it is long and thin, the comb is probably attached to the walls in many places.

So any advice to brianwindow@internode.on.net

Services Directory

Summary of available products and services

NRABA Members

Paul Davey (hive care)(Mullumbimby) 0491 608 272

David Fairhall(queen cells, mated queens, nuclei) (Lismore) 0444 513 771

Leland Eglinton (Steel beehive stands) (Alstonville) 0455 555 136

Brian Window (nuclei) (Lismore) 0466 790 736

Ross Wood (mated queens, nuclei)(Grafton) 0421 817 710

Not NRABA Members

Stephen Fowler (nuclei, hives, all sorts of bee equipment, buys wax) (Alstonville) 0418 412 621

Merv McDonald (nuclei, hives, hive care)(Alstonville) 0439 166 016

Rob Stone (mated queens, nuclei)(Casino) 0487 598 105

Corrections and additions welcome

April Field Day May 3rd

The field days are cancelled until further notice.

**Paranoia has reached
absurd stages...**

**I sneezed in front of
my laptop and the
anti-virus started a
scan on its own**



*An original May Gibbs drawing from 1919
which she drew for the Spanish Flu epidemic*