

waikato bee notes

NO. 30

February 1987

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Ministry of
Agriculture
& Fisheries



You really made a big hit with the Australian visitors we had to our field day. They couldn't get over how friendly you all were and your hospitality. As one couple said to me: "This beekeeper and his wife invited us to sit down on their blanket and have a cup of tea with them. We chatted away like we were old friends. This wouldn't happen back home." Well, I'm not too sure about that as I've found our Aussie cousins great hosts too. But anyway, they did enjoy the field day and their whole tour of New Zealand. We had a great time together and they saw a good cross-section of our industry and countryside. So thanks again Waikato beekeepers, I knew you wouldn't let me down.

Talking to Graham and Margaret Smith from Queensland made me glad that we don't have the cane toad in New Zealand. These things can grow up to 200 mm long and eat 60-80 bees in an evening. They can jump nearly half a metre so most hobbyist beekeepers put their hives on stands at least that high. They also use extra long entrance boards too as the toads leap up and scrape the hive front so making the bees come out. Commercial men use electric fences or stand their hives on chicken wire and bend a piece up over the entrance. In the States I've read that some beekeepers put down boards full of nails - or maybe that's for skunks. Never mind, the principle is the same.

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Seen on a toilet wall in LA airport: "Breakfast in New York, lunch in London, ... luggage in Amsterdam."

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SEASONAL UPDATE

I haven't got a lot of final in-tank figures but from reports to hand we shouldn't be far away from a 3.6 or even a 4 tonne per 100 hive crop. The difference this year is that there are no disaster areas and a lot of kiwifruit hives produced some honey. We seem to have a good percentage of white honey with some that would go 0-9 mm, which is unusual for the Waikato.

Disease figures are down, or about average, for this time of year. I only hope they are a true indication and we're not sitting on a lot of undeclared AFB hives?

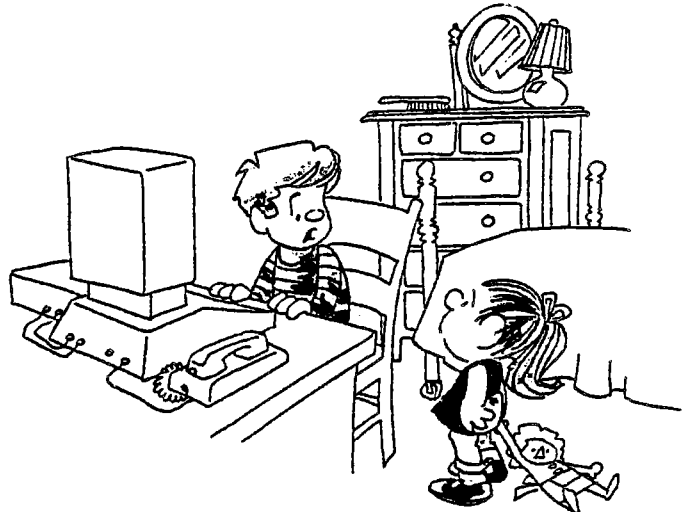
Chalkbrood has hung around a lot longer this year and many hives still have a cell or two or three. It doesn't seem to have affected the crop but these things are very difficult to measure. I can only recommend rigorous comb culling from the broodnest, keep the entrances free of damp grass and requeen with Italian stock.

We've been very late getting our first reminder letter out regarding your statement of inspection forms. Remember those? Yes, those computer forms due back here last December 7th! Thanks to those beekeepers who have returned them, and a plea to you guilty ones - please fill them in and send them back to me asap - which is MAF jargon for as soon as possible!

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OVERSEAS - WHAT'S HAPPENING?

- * Hives have come through the relatively mild north American winter in good shape but much spring feeding has been necessary.
- * However, Florida reports heavy spring dwindling with some beekeepers losing up to 50% of their overwintered colonies. Normal losses would be around 5%.
- * No one cause can be found although Amoeba, tracheal mites and nosema have all been seen in some samples. Beekeepers seem to be still supportive of the buy-back provision of the Honey Price Support Programme. However, as can be expected more and more beekeepers are saying that the buy-back rates are too low and packers are still purchasing cheaper imported honeys.
- * Canadian sellers are having a hard time moving quantities of their honey into the United States. Prices have come down and we're seeing the direct effect here in New Zealand as some Canadians are reluctant to place orders for queen bees and packages.
- * The big news in North America at the moment is that the Africanised bee has been confirmed in Chiapas, Mexico. See later for a more extensive report.
- * In Israel beekeepers estimate colony losses, due to Varroa, at 40% of the total hive number. Their beekeepers have imported packages and are buying numbers of queen bees from Australia and New Zealand to try and keep ahead of this devastating mite.



"Well, I just transferred Mom and Dad's entire life savings to our secret bank account in Switzerland. Now, how do we get there?"

- * China exported 54,000 tonnes of honey to more than 40 countries in 1985 which makes her the world's largest honey exporter.

Chinese beekeepers own over six million hives and produce about 155,000 tonnes of honey a year. This makes the Chinese the second largest owners of hives and producers of honey after the USSR.

- * A survey of 31 commercial beekeepers in Michigan showed an 8.7% return on investment.

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Mitterand, Gorbachev and Lange are standing in the Garden of Eden watching Eve share the apple with Adam:

"How romantic they look," sighs Mitterand, "evidenment they are French."

"Nyet," says Gorbachev, "see how they share the apple like good communists? They are Russian."

"No, you're wrong," says Lange, "nothing to wear, nowhere to live, practically nothing to eat, and thinking they're in Paradise. They're Kiwis!"

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1080 POSSUM PROGRAMMES

MAF and the Pest Destruction Board (PDB) have two big operations under way in Taumarunui and Te Kuiti. We've had a lot of problems with a few beekeepers in particular over shifting hives. Here are some of the main points to emerge from this year's programmes:

1. I haven't seen any evidence of bee kill in apiaries that were left on sites although some green honey is being analysed at Ruakura at the moment. The 1080 is fed in pellet form (by air), or mixed in with green apple jam.
2. Some bees were seen on the apple jam baits but wasps were the main problem. In one area in particular the wasps were taking all the pre-toxic baits put out to condition the possums. A tin of toxic jam was left out for the wasps and cleaned them out in less than two days!
3. The PDB and MAF do not have to notify beekeepers of impending programmes - only the farmers. We let beekeepers know as a goodwill gesture but after the way some of you have reacted this year we are rethinking this issue.
4. The PDB try and give two to three weeks notice of a programme. This year notices were sent out before Christmas and early in the new year for the Te Kuiti programme. Beekeepers should have organised their operations

in the expectation that the programme would go ahead. Early confirmation that these operations are definitely on is not always possible but it doesn't help when beekeepers claim, "I can't possibly move my hives in time. You've only given me one week's notice."

5. If we're to continue notifying beekeepers then it is essential that all your hives in these areas are registered.
6. The issue of compensation for beekeepers who chose to move hives was raised this year. It opens a real can of worms but is something the local branch or Executive could pursue with MAF or the PDB.
7. If beekeepers hold up a programme after being given due notice they can expect to get a bill from the PDB for men and machinery who were standing idle.
8. Most land-owners are supportive of the programme and are put to some inconvenience and cost with stock movement. If beekeepers alienate them too much more you may find you are not very welcome when you want to bring your hives back.

Having said all that I know it's only one or two who make life difficult for everyone and usually not the people reading this!

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When the bride saw twin beds in the bridal suite, she seemed upset.

"What's the matter, dear?" asked the bridegroom.

"Why, I surely thought we would have a room to ourselves!"

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ROBBING ROBBERS!

At a recent staff course we were talking about the age-old problem of robbing, when Cliff van Eaton from Whangarei told us of his experiences this season. He had read of an American whose technique was to take the lid and cover off all hives in the yard and leave them off until he'd finished. Cliff tried it himself and spent over an hour in a sizeable apiary checking for queens etc. I think he also said he deliberately left some honey from a "clean hive" by a fence-post to see if the bees would rob it. They didn't! We couldn't come up with any reason why the method should work.

I've also read of this system and a variation on the theme which involves blocking all the entrances first. The theory is the bees are so busy trying to get back in they don't "forage" on the honey you've just put on the truck!

There is one catch, however, as John Smith pointed out, "There must not be any other sizeable apiary nearby - say within 1-2 km - as bees from these hives will have a field day!" He's right, as I remember working some experimental hives in Taranaki many years ago on this system. Everything was going fine - all the lids off and frames of brood everywhere being measured and counted. Then the neighbouring apiary found us. We had to keep going but what a doozy of a robbing session! The strange thing was we didn't get too many stings, the bees were too busy going into the tops of the exposed hives and being repelled. I would say that it might work in the Waikato if you could be in and out of an apiary within one hour.



Another anti-robbing technique is to spray a weak sugar solution scented with peppermint on all the hive entrances before taking honey off.

MORE REGIONAL NEWS

* MAFTech, MAFQual, MAFFish and MAFCorp

These are the four new business units that the old 11 or so divisions of MAF now have to squeeze into. I can tell you that there is a lot of reorganising going on and a lot of slimming down. We've had a significant number of people take early retirement or resign which wouldn't be a bad thing except we've lost some of our best people.

As a general rule all advisers and scientists will be in MAFTech, with our field officers, animal health, meat and dairy people in MAFQual. At this stage I'll be in MAFQual too, not that you'll notice any difference!

As we now have to pay rent (and a lot of rent) for our building on Anglesea Street we'll be moving out to Ruakura asap. Rumour has it that dog kennels and broom closets are being converted for us! Not really, but space will no doubt be made available somewhere.



- * We have secured Mark Goodwin (soon to be Dr Mark) for the apiculture scientist position at Ruakura. This appointment is funded three ways - Industry Trust Fund, Kiwifruit Authority and MAF. Mark should be on station in June. We've also just managed to get the apiculture technician position transferred from Wallaceville. Anton ten Houton, who currently holds this position, used to work with Pat Clinch at Wallaceville. Anton and family should be moving to Ruakura in the next few months. It's possible that Mark and I will end up in the same building as the "A Team" - (the "Apiary Team" as opposed to the "Bee Team"?).

Mark has laid claim to a lot of Pat Clinch's equipment at Wallaceville but no doubt he will need help with establishing some experimental hives on sites. Some of you have offered help already which is appreciated. I'll keep you posted.

- * The beekeeping museum at Mystery Creek is slowly taking shape but I could do with some more old exhibits - and I don't mean the "trouble and strife"! I'd like to suggest that we hold our next remit meeting in the MAF office then go out to Farm World - possibly have lunch there - look at the museum and take in the live animal show at 2.30 pm. This goes for about an hour. It will be different, Farm World is a really professional show and they can do with our patronage.

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"Tact: the art of making people feel at home when you wish they were."

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NZ HONEY AND WAX EXPORTS (NZ Dept Statistics)

Latest figures available July 1986-February 1987 FOB (NZ\$)

	<u>Tonnes</u>	<u>\$ FOB</u>	<u>No. Countries</u>
Bulk	281	\$728,006	8
Retail	109	\$421,487	23
Comb	166	\$856,387	11
Honeydew	282	\$605,141	2
Beeswax	38.5	\$242,163	8

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TRADE TABLE

* Ampol Kopr-Kote

This is a high temperature anti-seize thread lubricant "that really works". It comes in 100 g tubes or 500 g cans and can be used on head studs, exhaust bolts, spark-plugs, pipe threads, burner connections and so on. You should be able to get it at most leading service stations or from Motor Specialties Limited and AB Auto Parts Limited.

* Hotcan

This is nothing to do with toilets but is a self-heating 425 g meal in a can! I saw them in the scout shop in Hamilton where they had two flavours; vegetable and beef casserole, and Irish stew. Apparently there are five flavours. This little gismo is really two cans, one inside the other. The heat is generated by piercing a plastic-filled liner which releases water onto a layer of limestone. The resulting chemical reaction heats the food. Neat eh?

At \$10.00 a can it's expensive eating, but could be a good standby for emergencies out in the bee yards, on the boat, at the beach etc?

* Export Statistics

If you want your own figures of our export performance for honey and beeswax, and now for queen bees and packages, you can get these from INFOS at the Department of Statistics, Private Bag, Wellington. You have to pay for this service now as below; prices include postage and GST and are for all relevant countries.

<u>No. Items</u>	<u>Annual Sub.</u>	<u>Price (incl. GST)</u>
Max. 5	Monthly data	\$77.00
	Quarterly data	\$60.50
	Annual data	\$52.80
Max. 15	Monthly data	\$148.50
	Quarterly data	\$82.50
	Annual data	\$57.20

* Hive Loader

The Mantis Electric Easyloader is another Australian swing boom loader that has just come onto the market. It claims to be lighter and cheaper than other models and is designed to be side or rear mounted on the truck. It is mounted on rails bolted to the chassis so can be easily removed from the truck if desired.

There are three models:

125 kg lift at 3.81 metre reach
200 kg lift at 4.42 metre reach
350 kg lift at 4.42 metre reach

The boom is easily adjustable to a level working position. On the 200 C model this is done automatically by pushing buttons on the cradle.

The makers claim you can operate all day off a truck battery that is in good condition. When not in use the Mantis folds down into a slim frame standing approximately one metre above the truck bed.

I don't have any prices but you could write to Mantis Easyloader Pty Limited, P O Box 1080, Coffs Harbour 2450, Australia - phone (066) 538327 - fax 066-538532.

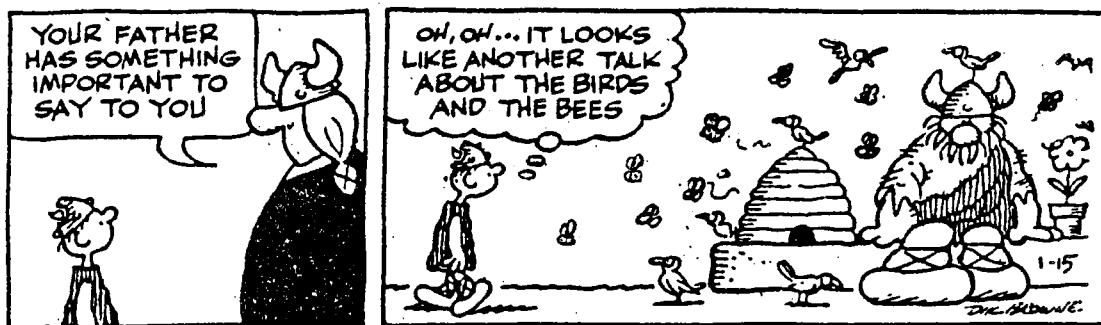
* Fireproofing Paints

The number of honey house fires in New Zealand is rather high, as are the "close calls". I've suggested a number of common sense things you can do before:

- Have electrical wiring checked regularly by an electrician.
- Keep your smoker in a tin or tin lined box on the truck.
- Wash benzaldehyde boards regularly and never place next to rags contaminated with turps or petrol.
- Build boiler rooms away from the honey house.
- Keep honey boxes in separate buildings.

Now there are some fireproofing paints and varnishes on the market that you could use to reduce the risk of a serious fire. I don't have current prices but you could get more information from:

- (a) Fireproofing Applications Limited, Corbett Road, Bell Block, New Plymouth, P O Box 7168 - phone 71491. These people are agents for Lurifuge. These products are made in France and come as matt or gloss paints or as varnishes.
- (b) Pinex Pty Limited, 230 Canterbury Road, Bayswater, Victoria 3153, Australia - phone (03) 7291277 have a fire retardant product called Firecote. Firecote is a milky white liquid that can be brushed or sprayed on to leave a clear finish. If you're treating timber exposed to the weather you'll need to prevent leaching by covering with Wood Shield, a weather repellent, or paint.



HANDY HINTS

- * If you have a microwave, they are great things to use for melting jars of honey, especially if they're already labelled. You'll find about 1½-2 minutes on high enough but you must remove the lid as honey froths. If the honey has crystallised solid you may need to stir it part-way through the heating cycle.
- * Still on microwaves - don't, and I mean never, melt beeswax in a microwave. The moisture in wax boils, expands, blows the wax apart and sticks rather firmly to the walls of the oven!
- * Another use I discovered for microwaves this summer while bottling a bunch of fruit. Put wet jars into the microwave and give them a few minutes on high. The water on the jars boils, "sterilises" the jars and pre-heats them ready for the hot fruit - neat eh?
- * Paint Brushes
 - (a) Drill a hole through the head - above the bristle line. After you've washed the brush thoroughly in water or turps push a large nail through the hole and suspend the brush over a jar. All the paint residue forms at the tips of the bristles which remain straight not bent.
 - (b) If there's still a bit of paint left on the bristle tips attack it with a wire brush. If there's a lot of paint you'll need to use a paint stripper.
- * Delicate Cutting Agent

If you need to cut a small painted area of your car, or whatever, then toothpaste makes a good cutting compound that's not too hard on the paint surface.
- * Working single storey hives in the spring is a pain - literally, right in the back! So, you probably do what I do, kneel down. Then you get very dirty overalls and wet knees! One remedy is to sew vinyl knee patches, or some other waterproof material, on the outside of your overalls.
- * If you ever start a grass fire in an apiary or wherever, and have some water handy, pour it around the outside edge of the fire, not onto the fire. If it's a grass fire the flames will run ahead of your water if you pour the water onto the flames.

* If you change your own oil and don't have a large funnel to pour the new oil into the crank case make one from an old four litre plastic oil pack. Just cut the bottom off, remove the cap and hey presto - a neat funnel. Put the cap back on when you've finished as there's always a bit of oil left in the "funnel".

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Plumbers' moto: "A flush is worth more than a full house."

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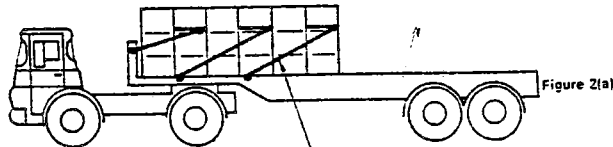
THE TRUCK LOADING CODE

One of our members recently received a ticket for carrying an insecure load. Not bee boxes but a load of uncovered sand! If the MOT is going to be tough on sand I would hope they get tough on cattle trucks that don't have under-deck containers to hold the "recycled grass" from the cattle on board. It's one of my pet peeves to be sprayed with effluent from someone else's "beeves".

Anyway, back to the point. I've referred you to this code before but if you need to know more call in to the MOT in Hamilton and ask there. Pay particular attention to the section on ropes. You'll find the minimum rope allowed under the code is a 12 mm polypropylene, polyester or nylon rope typically rated at 900 kg.

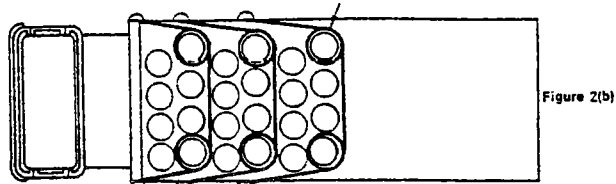
The following two diagrams come from another MOT booklet "Securing Hazardous Substances on Vehicles". I've seen the mess honey drums can make when they fall off trucks - not to mention the robbing! Full honey drums are heavy but they can still slide off a truck if not roped on properly. Don't get careless - you all know the old saying "for the want of a nail ...".

Vehicle with headboard but no sideboard, tailboard or stanchions. Load from headboard and back.



The rope must pass over three drums so that the rope is at least one-third the way up the second drum.

Rope must pass around the end drum in each case above the upper lip or be held up with hooks.



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"The do it yourself craze may one day extend to thinking."

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AFRICANISED HONEY BEE - Continues to move towards the USA.

Latest reports from America suggest that all the talk about setting up a bee barrier zone in the narrow neck of the Mexican peninsula will remain just that - talk.

The Africanised honey bee (AHB) has now been identified in the Mexican province of Chiapas, near the border with Guatemala. There doesn't seem to be the combined will of the American Government people, scientists or beekeepers to pull together and put the barrier plan in operation. Mind you it was going to be an enormous undertaking. The area under consideration for saturating with European bees is approximately 100 km x 160 km and covers dry coastal areas to wet swamp. It is mostly flat with some roads and not heavily populated.

The programme was to involve:

3872 apiaries
38,700 hives
15,500 drone traps
141,000 bait stations and hives
1144 unskilled employees
220 vehicles
88 remote work sites and one HQ

The initial budget was for US\$9 million the first year and around US\$4 million a year operating costs. Naturally the Mexicans want to start a programme on the southern border of their country, not in the middle. If their proposals are added on it becomes a US\$17 million programme.

This sounds a lot, but is probably chicken feed compared to possible legal litigations when people start getting killed by AHBs in the States. The effects of the AHB on pollination, honey production, hobbyist beekeeping, equipment manufacturers, and queen and package producers will be enormous, but impossible to assess at this stage.

What we do know is that the front of the AHB is still moving northwards at around 40-50 km a month. Some swarms are moving 90 or even 160 km before they establish a permanent nest and one expert predicts that the first AHB swarms will be at the Mexican isthmus this June or July! This is where the barrier plan was to be placed.

MAF sent 50 queen bees to the USDA in Beltsville two years ago as part of our continuing programme to gain access to the United States market. So far the bees have done well and of the queens introduced to hives 17 still remained as of last November. These were in their second season and while some were failing and had only produced one box of honey, others had done four.

Twenty packages are being donated by beekeepers & sent to Beltsville this autumn for further testing. If these are OK we can expect to get the green light and be allowed to export live bees direct to the United States.

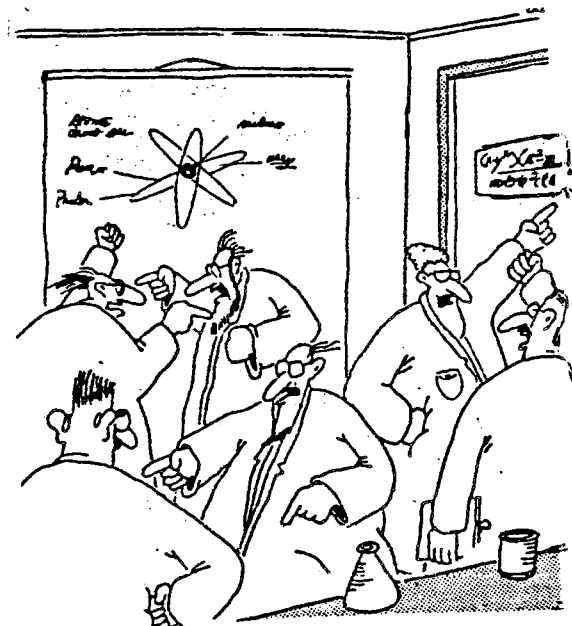
IRRADIATION OF AFB

Following Bruce White's talk at our field day on using gamma radiation to sterilise AFB, several of you have been asking me about it.

Yes, it does work and yes we could be getting a large facility in Auckland or even Huntly perhaps. However, before we get too excited MAF and the industry will have to look closely at the issues involved.

The main problems are:

1. Movement of large amounts of infected equipment around the country. In Australia all transport must be done in a commercial vehicle with an enclosed deck that is sealed and opened by the MAF.
2. All honey must be extracted from the combs prior to treatment. This, of course, raises the two issues of contaminating extracting gear and disposing of diseased honey.



Another case of too many scientists and not enough hunchbacks

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Some more graffiti from New York this time:

Jean Paul Sarte; "To be is to do."

A Camus; "To do is to be."

F Sinatra; "Do be do be do."

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I despise them mices!

It's mice time again so reduce hive entrances down; it doesn't matter how wide but no deeper than 8-9 mm. Alternatively put some "Squeak" in one or two beer cans (enlarge one end) and place under hives at each end of your apiaries.

WASPS

If you are a hive levy payer you should have received a sampling kit and questionnaire from the DSIR/MAF in Nelson.

We need your support to see how far the new species Vespula vulgaris has spread and if it is having any effect on bee hives. This is called the common wasp, although in the Waikato our "common" wasp still is Vespula germanica.

A recent report from Andrew Matheson in Nelson says he saw the common wasp (V. vulgaris) foraging on honey inside hives and on bees outside. This is bad news as the common wasp is not reported as being a serious pest of honey bees overseas or in New Zealand so far. It's relatively easy to tell the two species apart.



"Well, Bobby, it's not like you haven't been warned ... No roughhousing under the hornet's nest!"

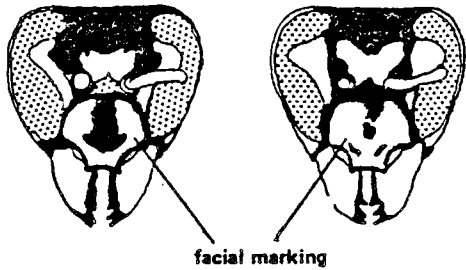


Fig. 2: Facial markings of *V. vulgaris* (left) showing the characteristic anchor shape, and *V. germanica* (right).

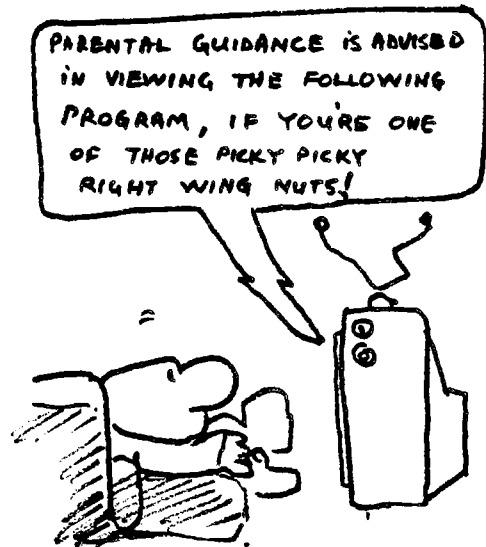


Fig. 3: Abdominal markings of *V. vulgaris* (left) and *V. germanica* (right).

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PLEA FROM LYNFIELD HONEY BEE
DIAGNOSTIC CENTRE

Please don't send samples in any old jars or containers. Buy the proper kits either from myself or Lynfield. A four bottle kit only costs \$3.50 (incl. GST). Have a kit in each vehicle so if you need to take a bee sample in the field you're prepared. These jars were specially selected and tested to prevent the bees decomposing unduly in the mail and also getting damaged.



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Another daffynition: "Pesticides - bugs that fly into a fan."

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DISCLAIMER: Mention of any product or supplier in this newsletter does not imply endorsement by MAF nor recommendation over similar products or suppliers not included.

History of the Waikato Domestic Beekeepers' Club:

The club is trying to trace it's roots. If anyone can help with some early history on when the club started, where they met etc please let me know and I'll pass on the details.

Well, that's about all from me for this newsletter. I'm afraid its sub renewal time again. I've held the price of the newsletter at \$10.00 per year but the "big fella" requires his 10%. So, if you want to receive any more issues please return the enclosed form and your cheque for \$11.00.

Bye for now

Murray.

G M Reid
Apicultural Advisory Officer