ISSN 0110-6325

The New Zealand BeeKeeper

MARCH 2000
VOL 7. No. 2

The Official Journal of the National Beekeepers' Association of New Zealand (Inc.),
C/- PO Box 21, Waipukurau, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand. Freephone: 0800 42-42-77

If undelivered please return to: National Beekeepers' Association of New Zealand (Inc.)
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1999 Subscriptions:
NZ $38.00 (GST Incl).
Overseas Airmail US $38.00.
Economy mail US $31.00.

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The New Zealand BeeKeeper is published eleven times per annum; February to December. All copy should be with the Editor by the 1st day of the month of publication except for December when copy should be received by **25th November.**

Notes from the Executive

President's comment

This month's "President's Notes" will take a somewhat different form. Rather than being a summary of the events of the past month and a general comment I am taking the opportunity to address the matter of the Apiary Register.

As you are aware the NBA is now dependent on the information in the Apiary Register for the calculation of Beekeeper Levies (as is detailed in the Commodities Levies (Bee Products) Order 1996).

The levies so collected represent 99% of the total revenue of the NBA, from which it must provide for:

(1) A programme to eliminate bee disease
(2) Promotional and Marketing programmes
(3) Administration services to the Association
(4) Production of the monthly publication of *The New Zealand BeeKeeper*

To this end it is essential, if the Association is to execute its responsibilities, as they are determined in the Commodity Levy Order 1996, that it is appropriately resourced.

In practice the Association, through its Executive Committee annually prepares its budget based entirely on the details of all leviable beekeepers hive and apiary holdings, as they are expressed in the register. Beekeepers are subsequently invoiced, in January of each year, according to the information supplied.

From the responses received it is clear that some of the data is somewhat dated. Apiary numbers have altered as beekeepers alter their management practices. Hives have been sold or shifted and so on. In one case the beekeeper concerned has not held hives since 1986. Another beekeeper died in 1977 and his Executors sold the hives, and yet the information pertaining thereto is still current according to the register.

In mitigation thereof it must be said that, as in any database which is largely dependent on voluntary inputs, as is the case with the Apiary Register, the data stored is a direct reflection of the information supplied to it.

When data is not regularly upgraded or, is incorrectly inputted or, when it contains errors these will be expressed in the outputs. Where beekeepers themselves fail to advise of changes in status, of the sale or transfer of hives and apiary sites, changes in address etc, then clearly the calculated/anticipated income and the revenue received is markedly overscale, and judging from the correspondence and phone calls that the administration has received in that time, it is clear that the initial calculation derived from the register is less than accurate. This is a major concern to the Executive and to the Association as a whole.

However, it is not only the question of NBA revenue that is concerning the Executive, there is the matter of the Association's ability to fulfill its statutory obligations as the Management Agency for the National Pest Management Strategy (American Foulbrood). In this the Executive is equally dependent on having access to accurate data. The effectiveness, or otherwise, of the "Strategy" to achieve its objective will be determined, very largely, by the information back up available to it. In this case the Apiary Register is that data back-up.

Similarly, the same can be said for the other functions that depend on the register. For instance there is the matter of Export Certification for honey. This is dependent on data drawn from the register. Likewise, for the regulation of Toxic Honey production. For surveillance and EDPR purposes the register is the only database that can be drawn upon.

The Executive and Association has its concerns, but the above mentioned are matters of national and even international significance. The concern here is that inaccuracies shown up through the levy gathering process must translate right across the board to all areas where the basic data is drawn from the Apiary Register.

The Executive Committee recognises the fact that the Apiary Register/database is an essential element to the Association, to the industry, and obviously in the best interest of the Crown itself. It is also cognisant of the fact that if the register/database is to be effective in all its roles it must have the confidence of those who depend upon it. It must be as accurate as its practicable and earn for itself a full measure of trust, respect and confidence in its integrity.

Given this the Executive believes it to be timely that there be a review/overhaul of the data in the register. While it is sensible of its own responsibilities in this respect, it has to acknowledge that it does not have all the resources to hand to put such a project into effect.

Similarly it does not believe that it must carry this responsibility alone and to this end suggests that is should be an "all parties" task.

By "all party" I not only include the Crown Agencies who have a stake in the register, but every beekeeper whether he has one hive or one thousand hives.

At the time of writing MAF Animal Biosecurity Authority, under Dr Barry O'Neal is undertaking a nationwide audit of the register. The objective being to establish the accuracy of the data.

This is one of the initial steps in the review task. Details of this audit will form the basis for future discussions between the Animal Biosecurity Authority and the NBA Executive as they move toward the resolution of the "Agreement for Access and Maintenance of the Register".

For its part the Executive will be working with the Executive Secretary and Murray Reid of Agriquality NZ Ltd, currently the service provider contracted to maintain the register on behalf of the PMS Management Agency, to ensure the pathways and access between the two are free of any information blockages.

And we as Beekeepers, irrespective of how many hives we might individually have, are equally party to this responsibility. We have a statutory and moral duty to ensure that the information we supply to the register, whether by way of the Annual Disease Return, or by any other means, is as accurate as possible and is regularly up-dated.

No doubt there will be times when returns are overlooked in the face of more pressing personal issues. Don't let this deter you from submitting a "late return". Better late than never.

It may also be that there are those who would knowingly manufacture their returns in an endeavour to minimise levy payments. If this is your thing then do so by all means, but know that it is your Association that is hurt by being deprived of the resources it needs by entering inaccurate information you seriously compromise the Pest Management Strategy by limiting its capacity to meet its objectives.

Cover: Photo courtesy Klaus Nowottnick, Germany.

The New Zealand **BeeKeeper**

THIS ISSUE

The Apiary Register is effectively the foundation upon which the Association functions. It plays a pivitol role in our individual and collective futures as beekeepers. If it is to provide the services and inputs the industry, as such needs, it must be furnished with the most accurate and up-to-date data that it is possible to get.

As I see it's up to each and every one of us to play his/her part in assuring the register is, in all respects, adequate to meet the demands expected of it.

Terry Gavin

IMPORTANT NOTICE:

Federated Farmers of New Zealand (Inc.) now provide the Association's secretarial services. Tim Leslie is the new secretary and first point of contact.

His contact details are:

Secretary, National Beekeepers' Association of New Zealand (Inc.)
PO Box 715, Wellington 6015, New Zealand

Phone: (04) 473-7269 • Fax: (04) 473-1081

E-mail:tleslie@fedfarm.org.nz

Waikato Branch National Beekeepers Association

The Waikato Branch Field Day will be held at Opal Springs Matamata (Springs Road), on Saturday, 25th March. Starting time 10.00am

Our programme will include:

Propolis - discussion, current market trends • Pest Management Strategy - update and information about the tests
Honey Research Unit - some current research topic and/or update
The by-products of the beehive - panel discussion • Hive loader demonstration/competition
What's new on the staple gun market? • Liquid smoke - what is it?

~ Bring along your gadgets for our gadget shield competition ~

Sausage sizzle will be held at lunch time, and a raffle held during the day to help raise funds for the branch. Tony Lorimer, Secretary.

Letters to the Editor

Dear Sir

Recently there was an article in the *NZ BeeKeeper* that was basically praising up the value of 'Active' manuka and condemning all other manuka honey.

From my observations there may be characteristics of manuka honey and honey in general which cannot be categorized by 'activity' or hydrogen peroxide production etc.

For instance our manuka honey is being used very successfully by a South Island hospital to treat the 'Super Bug' with miraculous results (their description).

Our honey is not 'Active' but we have taken care to avoid heat and retain the full enzyme activity. It may be that more care with all types of honey produced in New Zealand will get worldwide recognition as the best available.

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Gary Jeffery

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Trevor Douglas Rowe
1937-2000

It is with sadness that we record the death of Trevor as a result of an accident while tree felling with the family on 17 January.

Trevor had an interest in bees from the age of thirteen and he went on to establish Eltham Apiaries. During his 45 years of beekeeping he developed this into one of the biggest honey producers in Taranaki peaking at 2300 hives. In 1997 he retired and sold the business to his daughter and son in-law, Sonia and Bryon Bluett although he took an active interest and helped out where he could.

Trevor was a good beekeeper and woodworker. He produced all his own gear. He knew how to get a box of honey off a failing hive in a bad season. These were the days of huge boxthorn and barberry hedges, hay paddocks full of clover; good honey crops but low prices.

Hives were off the ground on concrete stands, kneepads were used so that all inspection work was done with a straight back. The bees were black but they knew how to gather honey. Trevor worked quickly and efficiently through the hives, pointing out different things as he went, ignoring the odd sting (the skin on his hands was like leather).

Supering was easy. If the lid was stuck down, the hive needed another honey super. If it wasn't, he would inspect the brood nest and squash the queen if the pattern wasn't up to scratch, then put in a frame of eggs from a good hive. Trevor didn't believe in conventional queen breeding although he did put in a few hundred yellow queens one year after being pestered by Nick Wallingford who was working for him at the time.

He was also a bit of a show off and his party trick was to remove a hive lid in one movement with a quick kick, no matter how high the hive.

Trevor was an active branch member:

He was at the inaugural meeting of the South Western District Branch on February 27 1971.

He held a number of executive positions:

Secretary 1972 to 1977; Deputy delegate to Conference 1977; President and Delegate to the National Conference 1978 to 1981; Committee member from 1982 to 1989; He stood for Executive unsuccessfully in the mid 1980's.

He worked quietly in the background but talked very loudly because of his deafness. He was also a member of the committee that organised the very successful conference held in 1984 at New Plymouth.

We held a number of field days at Trevor's Honey House. His honey house was a showpiece that worked on the gravity system which was current at the time it was built. He had a wealth of knowledge and was always willing to pass on ideas and information to make our beekeeping activities easier.

Trevor was also active in the community, his church, Rotary and The Taranaki Vintage Farm Machinery Club.

He was immensely proud of what he had achieved in his beekeeping career.

He will be missed.

Oil thickening in light weight diesel engines

From time to time we encounter instances of excessive oil thickening in light weight diesel engines. While the factors which contribute to this condition are many and varied, the obvious culprit in the minds of motorists is the oil itself which is, in reality, the least likely cause of the condition.

High performance engine oils marketed by the major reputable oil companies have been developed to the point that in heavy duty diesel highway engines 40,000 km service intervals are not unusual and the oil is still in reasonably good condition. This exact same lubricant, usually an SAE 15W/40 meeting at least API CF4/SG specification, cannot go to 5,000 km in a light diesel engine without significant thickening and deterioration.

The major difference in oil performance is due not only to differences in engine design but mostly due to operating condition. A diesel engine does not achieve combustion efficiency until it reaches operating temperature which usually takes 20 to 30 minutes of running. During this warm up period, incomplete combustion deposits excessive quantities of carbon and soot on the cylinder walls where it is collected and absorbed by the dispersant additive in the oil. Frequent stop/starts, short trips and periods of idling also increase the moisture contamination of the engine oil.

As most light weight diesels are not spectacular performers, most people tend to drive them hard through the gears, which leads to over fueling and further contamination of the oil. The combustion by products from a petrol engine are volatile and can be driven off once the engine is run at full operating temperature for a period of time.

However, the combustion by products from a diesel engine cannot be driven off by engine temperature and as such are totally accumulative.

This build up of combustion residue eventually, leads to the oil becoming very thick at cold start up so that it does not flow through the engine correctly thus contributing to increased wear rates. The excessive moisture levels combine with the soot and carbon in the oil producing sludge deposits, especially in the valve cover.

The way to head off these problems is to ensure a good quality brand name SAE 15W/40 of at least API CF4/SG specification is used and the oil and filters are changed very 5,000km.

Other factors that contribute to oil thickening are:

- Starting with a high viscosity oil, ie. SAI 20W/50 should not be used.
- Using an oil of lower performance level, ie. API SF/CO specification is totally unsuitable.
- Engine running too cold due to faulty thermostat or, even worse, no thermostat at all.
- Faulty injectors of fuel pump set incorrectly.

by Les Gould
Acknowledgment: The Automotive Engineer
May/June 1995

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South Canterbury

We have experienced the coolest, cloudiest summer I can remember in South Canterbury.

Early November another drought was a distinct possibility, but it started raining about the second week of November, and it was then the seemingly never ending task of feeding really strong hives began, and continued through to the second and third week of December, resulting in most businesses feeding record amounts of sugar syrup. Hives were barely self sufficient until mid January in some areas.

January weather statistics from Timaru recorded only 48 hours of sunshine during the first twelve days, and no sunshine hours at all for the first five days, so things were very gloomy. In fact it wasn't until the last week of January that any significant amounts of honey appeared in hives.

While coastal areas were blanketed in cloud, the McKenzie country was enjoying fine, sunny summer weather, producing good honey crops.

February saw a better weather pattern with an abundance of nodding thistles, so crop predictions at this stage look about average. Most will be happy with this, but there is disappointment, as this was the big crop that got away on us. There was clover and thistles every where, hives were incredibly strong, and the moisture was in the ground, but the sun just didn't shine for us.

Peter Smyth

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In my view ...

Never a Dull Moment

One fine sunny afternoon last year I visited a very well known beekeeper. Sometimes when I go by his place I drop in for a yarn. His wife was at home and kindly invited me inside for a cup of tea, saying that her husband would be back soon as he had just gone up the road somewhere to fly spray some bees that were making a nuisance of themselves. We had just sat down to a cup of tea when her husband arrived back home and parked his small truck beside the house. He joined us for a cup of tea. We talked for some time about bees and other things. Suddenly there was a loud explosion about the same decibel level as a double barrelled shotgun with both barrels being fired simultaneously. We naturally all rushed outside and found the beekeeper's truck with a shattered front window. An empty fly spray can had been left on the ledge below the front window and the hot sun had caused it to explode.

If the beekeeper concerned should read this story I would like to assure him that in future when I visit him it will only be on a wet cloudy day. It could have been worse. The empty fly spray can could have been a half full spray paint canister and he would have had a big job cleaning the inside of the truck cab in addition to getting a new front window!

I expect it is safe enough to leave empty spray cans by a window whilst driving along the road with the wind blowing against the window having a cooling effect, but it is not a good idea to park a truck in the direct rays of the sun with empty spray cans against the window.

Ron Mossop

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A PMS update from the PMS review committee

In February, the NBA Executive appointed a new PMS Review committee, with a role of completing the first full operational review, since the PMS was given the green light 18 months ago. For the members with access to the PMS operational plan, our terms of reference start at 4.9 on page 31. For everybody else, our brief is basically to review the PMS and our contractors, to ensure the NBA is getting the services we pay for, and to ensure these services are achieving the industry goal of eradicating AFB.

A major part of our review is getting feedback from the branches and individual members. There has been truck loads of political comment and rumour, but the time has come to hear the **TRUE FACTS** of how the PMS is operating in the field.

We need your Written and Factual comment on the good and bad aspects of the PMS. Tell us what is great, and what areas need some tuning to make it work. A questionnaire will be sent to branches shortly, but if you want to write something direct, now is your chance. Replies will remain confidential to the committee. Send replies to:

Murray Bush C/-Email:bushes.honey@xtra.co.nz or RD 2, 168 Old Renwick Road, Blenheim.

The importance of a successful industry disease programme was highlighted by a recent report from America, indicating the USA would find it very difficult using AFB as a trade barrier on live bee exports, because of the extensive AFB identification programme (PMS) employed in New Zealand.

To ensure the committee remains focused and aware of this importance, we have stated our commitment to the industry objectives listed in the PMS operational plan, such as reducing reported AFB annually, ensuring all beehives receive an adequate baseline inspection for AFB, and to ensure members have an ability to identify AFB.

Other objectives adopted include ensuring the PMS is a fluid document able to survive the tests of time and adapt to changing sciences and new beekeeping practices. The PMS must also be financially viable, which means the NBA must control the PMS, **NOT** the other way around.

The PMS is not operated for the benefit of this committee, nor the NBA Executive, but ultimately the ordinary beekeeping members of our industry. You have voted to implement the PMS, you are paying for it with hive levies, now tell us what is required to ensure the PMS remains a vibrant document for years to come.

The members of the PMS review committee are: Murray Bush (Chairman), Graham Cammell, Lewis Olsen, Ian Spence and one member yet to confirm his acceptance.

The position of PMS facilitator will be filled from outside the committee. Until the facilitator's role is filled, enquiries can be directed to Murray Bush.

It is our intention to have an update each month in the magazine. Questions not answered before publication, will hopefully appear in these articles.

Murray Bush

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Library News...

We received the following additions for the Library

Papers from the authors:

Dr P Molan "The role of honey in the management of wounds", 1999, 4 pp, NZ. A review of the evidence on the advantages of using honey as a topical wound treatment together with practical recommendations for its clinical use.

Mrs Mary Allen: "Notes for a Beginners Course held in the Wanganui district", 1999, 23 pp, NZ.

Mrs Allen was asked to participate in running this course aimed at the hobbyist starting with one or two hives. She freely shared her knowledge and experience with those attending the course and is now following it up by giving further advice and help to the pupils who have become firm friends. These notes show the very thorough preparations she made. A great effort indeed.

Anyone called upon to perform a similar task could do much worse than having a look through these pages.

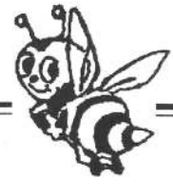
Book, donated by Mr Andrew Matheson

Colin ME, Ball BV and Kilani M (scientific editors) "Bee disease diagnosis", 1997, 182pp, Tunisia.

An interesting publication written for Mediterranean conditions. Contributions from a number of experts from different countries. Clear text, with black and white photos and a number of diagrams. Much of the content applies to our New Zealand conditions. Good to have it in our collection, it will prove to be useful.

Many thanks to the donors.

BEE ENTERPRISES



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Queen Bees: Holding spares

For successful beekeeping it is essential to have a supply of queen bees on hand for the odd hive that goes queenless etc.

Of course you can always send away for a queen but often hives deteriorate while waiting, or you cannot get a queen because of holidays etc.

One solution is to keep spare queens in four frame nuclei but these can get too strong and need constant management.

Another solution is to run a multiqueen hive using the extra queens as required.

First, divide a brood box into three, using plywood or hardboard resulting in three compartments each holding three frames. Give each compartment a separate entrance. One in the front for the centre nucleus and one each side toward the rear for each side unit. The entrances are quite sufficient, about four or five centimetres long and one centimetre high.

Make the floor board deep enough to hold two or three kilograms of sugar for each nucleus. Take care there are no gaps sideways that would let the units contact each other.

Make up nuclei of one frame of bees and brood and one of honey and a third empty frame. Don't be stingy over bee numbers.

Introduce a queen to each unit and then place a good fitting mat on top so the bees are kept quite separate.

Once each unit is going okay with sealed brood hatching, place an excluder on top taking care to put wooden rims on the excluder to keep the bees from going sideways into the next nucleus although they can go from nucleus to nucleus through the excluder.

Then add a super on top. As the season progresses the three nuclei will work together to fill the super. Add more as required.

Remember each unit needs feeding separately until there is honey in the super as one can starve even if the next door nucleus is full of honey.

If a queen is needed, one queen can be taken out and a divider removed making one of the lower units six frames instead of three.

It can again be repeated if a second queen is needed.

This method of holding queens has advantages over the nucleus system as you can just super and forget once the flow starts.

You can also gain a crop from your spare queens.

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Putting Old Sol to work

Construction of a solar wax extractor is described by DA Briscoe, Apiary Instructor, Department of Agriculture, Tauranga.

The use of solar wax extractors is once again becoming popular, particularly with beekeepers in the warmer parts of the North Island.

There is nothing new in this method of obtaining beeswax from cappings and/or old combs. Solar heat is used in many different ways and this form of heating is cheap and efficient.

Beeswax has a melting point of approximately 140-145°F. The temperatures in a well made solar extractor will reach over 200°F in sheltered positions.

The advantage of a solar extractor is that no slumgum is present in the melted wax and also, discolouration is kept to a minimum because there is no water to be contaminated with residues and propolis from the combs and frames. Another advantage is that old or damaged combs, as well as scraping of burr combs from the tops and sides of frames, can be dealt with daily and not kept for off season handling. If old combs are kept for too long a period they become a breeding place for wax moth and eventually will be reduced to a worthless mass.

The extractor has five parts.-

1. The body.
2. The lid.
3. A large pan in which the cappings or combs are placed.
4. A small pan to catch the melted wax and honey.
5. A basket made of heavy gauge two, three or four-mesh hardware cloth to use in the pan when cappings are melted.

The wire mesh basket is placed in the large pan with a sufficiently large piece of muslin for straining and the cappings or combs then placed in the wire basket. As the wax melts it is strained through the muslin cloth into the large pan and then directed through an opening into the smaller pan or mould.

Directions for making the extractor are as follows.

The body and most of the lid of the extractor are made from the 12' board (see list of materials needed).

This board is laid out and cut into pieces as indicated in the diagram. The double lines on the drawing indicate where a saw cut should be made between the lines as the pieces on both sides of the cut are to be used.

The side pieces for the body of the extractor are fastened, with screws, on the ends of the two pieces cut to form the ends of the body. The four edges formed on the top and bottom of the box are not even because of the sloping side walls. There edges are planed until all four are level with the ends of the box.

The bottom of the extractor is made from the tongue-and-groove timber. The body of the extractor must be carefully squared before any of the boards are nailed to the bottom and must be kept square, as the lid will not fit if the body is not square.

The two long wedge-shaped pieces left over from cutting the side boards are cut off at their thin ends so they will be 21 1/2" long. They are nailed inside the box on the bottom.

Solar wax extractor in use. In the foreground is a block of wax previously melted.

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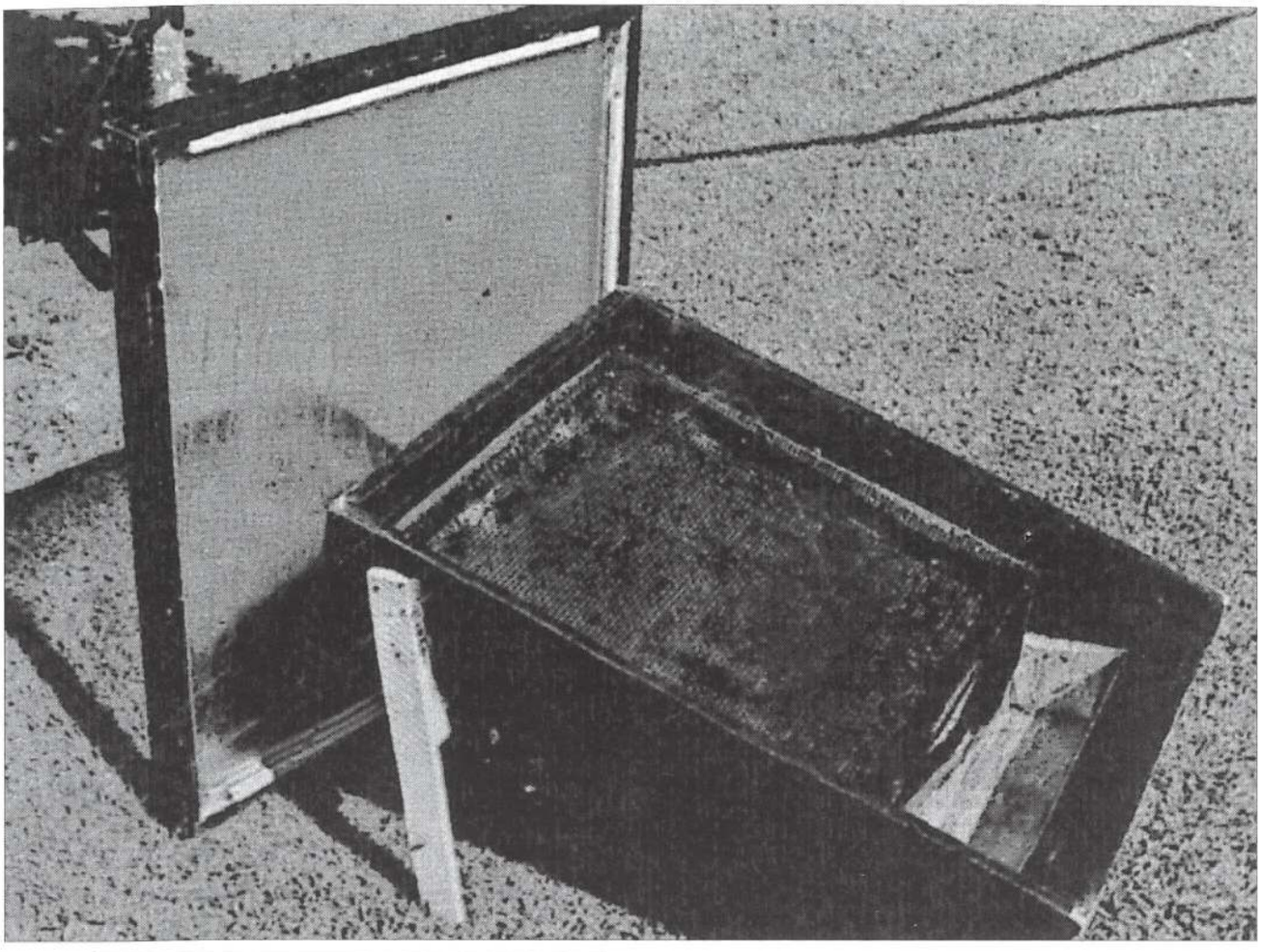

Above: Components of the solar wax extractor.

The piece left over in cutting the narrow end of the box fits on the bottom in the space at the end of the wedges and is nailed to the ends of the two wedges.

Three small wedge-shaped pieces, each 4" long, are cut from the scraps. The wide end of each wedge should be 1 1/4" while the other end comes to a point. These pieces are also nailed to the bottom. They are intended to keep the small pan level.

The cover, or lid, is made from the two pieces of glass. Four 2 1/4" strips should be dovetailed at the corners then nailed together to form a frame for the glass. If dovetailing is not possible two of these four pieces should be cut 25 5/8" long to compensate. The corners could be strengthened by corner plates if necessary.

After the frame is nailed together, one set of 1/2" square pieces is nailed around the inside of the frame at a distance of 9/16" from the top of the frame. Two 1/4" holes are then bored through the top and two through the bottom ends of the frame through the 1/2" strips. Each hole is bored 5" from the centre of the frame. The holes provide ventilation between the layers of glass and reduce the condensation of water in this space. The holes are bored before the glass is placed in the frame.

The glass is held in place with the 1/2" square strips (already nailed in the frame) and is held in place with a second set of strips. The second piece of glass is placed below the 1/2" strips and is held in place with a third set of strips.

The extractor will last longer if the wood from which it is made is treated against rot before being assembled.

It would be desirable also to make sure that the lid fits over the body of the extractor before the glass has been placed in position. Putty may be used on the top of the cover, in the same manner as for a window sash to make it waterproof.

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Date: 28 March 2000 Tuesday
Time: 7.30pm sharp
Venue: Rumpletums
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Supper/cover charge $2 per head

TW Corbett
Secretary

The legs are attached to the rear of the extractor to keep the rear end about 14" off the ground. The legs are made from the two 15" strips and are nailed to the body of the extractor after a wedge shaped piece 4" long is nailed to the top. The wedges keep the legs perpendicular.

The pan for the combs or cappings is made from the larger sheet of metal. It is 21 3/4" x 23 1/2" and 2 1/2" deep. The upper portion of the pan walls is made 3/4" wider and 1/2" longer than the bottom in order to provide slanting sides.

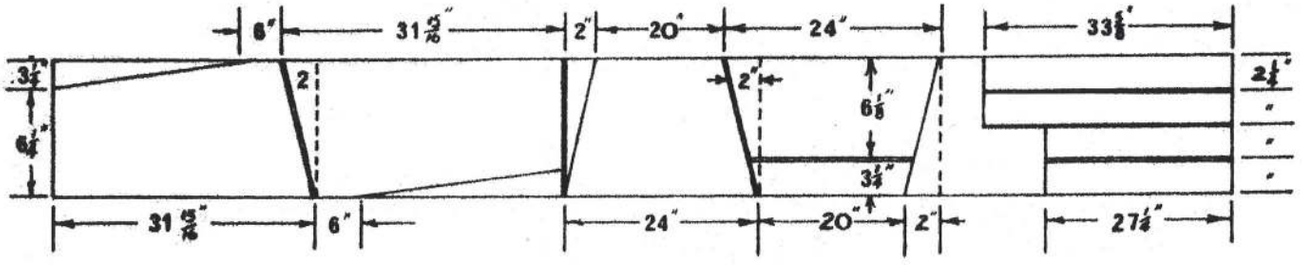
The lower end of the pan is cut back on both sides so that the sides are 1 1/2" shorter than at the centre, which when the pan is assembled, makes the front slope from the sides to the centre. This arrangement permits the melted wax to run toward the centre of the pan, through an opening, which is cut 2 1/2" wide, into a smaller pan placed below the larger one.

The pan in which the wax and honey from cappings collects is made from the smaller sheet of galvanized iron. This pan measures 4 3/4" wide by 20" along the top and is 3 3/4" deep. It is made 1/2" narrower on the bottom than at the top of the wall. This allows the cakes of wax (when cooled) to come away freely from the pan. Half an inch of the top edges of the walls is turned out, down and then hammered flat. This pan may be too large for small qualities of wax so it would be advisable to make a second pan 4" wide by 10" long.

Cappings can be rendered more efficiently if placed on a basket made from the hardware cloth. The basket is placed on the large pan. It is made 21 1/2" wide x 22" long x 2 1/2" deep. A piece of fine cheesecloth is placed in the basket to strain the honey and wax before they flow into the smaller pan.

If a basket of this type is not used, the partly melted cappings have a tendency to flow down the pan and over the edges before they are entirely melted. Old combs, however, do not flow in this way so they could be placed directly on the metal tray.

The solar wax extractor should be placed in a protected location - preferably facing north and should, if possible, be away from the prevailing winds.



List of materials

(a) One board (well seasoned) 13/16", 9 1/2" wide and 12' long.
(b) 6 1/2' of tongue-and-groove.
(c) 36' of timber 1/2" square.
(d) Two pieces of timber 13/16" x 2" x 15".
(e) Two pieces of 24oz glass each approximately 32" x 25 1/2". (The glass should be cut to fit the frame for the lid after this has been nailed and checked to make sure it is the correct size.)
(f) One piece of 24 gauge galvanised iron 26 3/4" x 28 1/2".

The birds and the bees

The subject of 'The birds and the bees' was among my favourites at school. It was my grandfather who told me a lot of what I needed to know too. I could ask him anything and he knew from experience; what to do and how to do it; when it came to bees. He kept several hives in his orchard in Darry and encouraged me to have-a-go in my teenaged years.

My grandmother has become a little well known for her wonderful sewn creations since then and one day, when I asked her what had happened to the antique, turn-by-hand sewing machine, she replied, "I gave it to the B man." Momentarily speechless I asked, 'Er, the B man?

'Yes', she insisted, 'The nice bee man. He and your grandfather kept bees in the orchard'.

It was John Donoghues's Grand Uncle who first made him interested in bees. Then, like many children, he found the next door neighbours home beckoned with more interest than his own and they kept bees too. Now, after twenty years of keeping bees, the still young John Donoghue is President of the Beekeepers Federation of Ireland and a very knowledgeable apiarist.

His trade and livelihood is carpentry, but his real vocation is honey bees. He had just come back from London when I spoke to him, having won eight prizes at an international gathering of friendly beekeepers for the honey from his thirty hardworking hives.

Bees are truly extraordinary creatures. Yet many people become hysterical, wildly flailing their arms when even the mild tempered Irish 'Black' Bee (which is actually dark brown) comes buzzing near them. But a bee's existence is really only in utter dedication to its colony - 'all for one and one for all' - tiny Musketeers in earnest, intelligent pursuit of the floral gifts in blossoms to make the Nectar of The Gods.

Honey has been a revered and cherished sweetener in sumptuous dishes since ancient, prebiblical cultures through to our era. We, in less reverence scrape it over toast or schmooze it round a crumble croissant, but the Greeks and the Arabs..ah! They create lap-dripping, finger-licking desserts luscious with honey and nuts between the elfin layers of fine pastry.

Trevor Rainsbury loves honey on his porridge. It was unwise of me to call him before his morning repast. As clever as a worker bee, he suddenly feigned deafness and asked me to

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ring back later. He, a distinguished veteran of the Offaly Beekeepers Association, is absolutely convinced of its healing properties, for he never gets a cold.

John Donoghue is also convinced. If ye be a hay fever sufferer, then acclimatise yourself throughout the non-sneezing seasons by eating honey. Comb honey has a higher concentration of pollen locked into the perfect hexagonal cells and by consuming that on your toast, you will build up a natural resistance. Think of it as a prescription for health. An oral injection of a dreamy essence, reminding one of Spring hedgerows, Summer meadows and purpled boglands: a direct hit to all the sensory perceptions.

When the Offaly Beekeepers' Association bring all their receptacles of different honeys to The Tullamore Show for public tastings, adults and children are amazed at the variety of colours and delicious flavours. Some of them, like the heather honey, are to some degree an acquired taste. But, did you know that every year the honey in the hives is a little different to the last. Like a vintage wine, the subtleties can be savoured and discussed by connoiseurs.

In our area from May, there is delicious honey from tree blossoms: aromatic hawthorn, sycamore and horse-chestnut; in July the nectar of clover and blackberry flowers is gathered which produces a light coloured honey. Later on comes the strong, 'masculine' heather blossom honey.

The sad thing is that with the changes in our culture and farming methods, few in the younger generations know how honey is made and that its creator and its creation is under threat. Nor do many realize how essential bees are for our environment.

A terrible threat has now reached Ireland. It is the Varroa (which sounds more like a Renaissance town setting for a romantic play) - a mite which eats the lava of bees, is hermaphrodital (the female breeds with itself) and is carried on the worker bees to other colonies. It eats the bee grubs, devouring its juices and can easily decimate a colony. It has been on the European Continent for years and sadly has recently been found in Sligo. If only St Patrick could come back and banish the mite. It will eventually destroy the wild honey bee colonies, though not bumble bees. With very careful attention by loving beekeepers, who are not just in the game for the honey, the mite can be controlled, but not eradicated as yet.

Another threat is the good farmer's idea of a nice neat farm. Hedges sawn to squareness and wild flower meadows fertilized with chemicals, destroy all the blooming loveliness for the cheery bees. They must hum and buzz and do their little dances back at the hive to tell of a far-off utopia and thus exhaust their travelling resources.

One may assume that the Italians are an easy-going lot but think of the mafia and you'll get an idea of the nature of a cross-bred bee. They are so bad tempered that breeders are working hard to get back to racial purity.

'Black is back, darlings - the rage is history!' The Irish bee, hardened to our climate, is being nurtured back to strength.

On the subject of genetics, John Donoghue would definitely not like to have a crop of Genetically Modified anything near his hives. Bees travel a mile for a good source of nectar and pollen but they will sometimes travel for three miles. By gathering the nectar and pollen, they enable plants to re-produce - male pollen on the female stamen, creating healthy, cross-pollinated flowers and trees.

The bees convert the nectar into honey to feed the new brood and the pollen, which one sees in lovely yellow pantaloons on their back legs, in converted into wax. The wax is built up into miriad hexagonal combs of about two centimetres in which the Queen Bee lays her eggs to create mostly more female Worker bees (why is that so true, even in bees!) and relatively few male Drones.

There is so much more to tell about this special insect, but not enough space here to write it. If you hear a very loud buzzing over Offaly now and then, it could be John Donoghue communing with the bees on the breeze in a bi-plane. He flies from Birr airfield now and again to look sadly down at diminishing meadows and a few renegade hedgerows and hopes that soon the beekeepers message in the Millennium will sting guilty hearts and save our natural environment in time.

What could be a more considerate Christmas present than a jar of wonderful honey? Local honey can be bought in several shops in Tullamore: Phelans Fruit and Veg., Queenie Greens and Mother Earth amongst them.

For further information about seminars, lectures and outdoor demonstrations, contact Mr Donoghue at 050 249-579 or Mr Rainsbury (after breakfast) at 050-650-918.

You can also see a hive in operation (although the bees are sleeping these winter days) at the DH Williams Heritage Centre on Bury Quay.

UK to accept New Zealand package bees

New Zealand package bees can now be exported to the United Kingdom. Work over several years by New Zealand's Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, have paid off.

Package bees have not been permitted into the UK primarily because of the perceived threat of Kashmir bee virus (KBV) on a bee population already infected with varroa.

The UK Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food commissioned a risk assessment on a range of honey-bee diseases (including KBV) and a separate risk assessment on possible impacts on plant health.

Both risk assessments determined that imports of New Zealand package bees would not present a significant economic hazard that would justify continued prohibition of imports.

Trade is expected to be able to commence once final details of certification are negotiated between authorities in New Zealand and the UK.

Andrew Matheson
International Agreements Manager
Biosecurity Authority
Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
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Wellington
New Zealand
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RECIPES

Honey-Nectarine Cheesecake

For the crust:

1 cup sliced almonds
1 cup Graham cracker crumbs
1/4 cup (2 oz) firmly packed brown sugar
5 tbsps unsalted butter, melted and cooled

For the filling:

2 lb cream cheese, at room temperature
1/3 cup (4 oz) honey
1/4 cup (2 oz) granulated sugar
1 cup (8 fl oz) heavy cream
2 tbsp fresh lemon juice
1/2 tsp almond extract
1 tbsps water
1 tsp unflavoured gelatin
3 tbsps apricot or peach jam
4 ripe nectarines, halved, pitted and sliced

Preheat an oven to 350°F. Spread the almonds on a baking sheet and place in the oven until lightly toasted and fragrant, about 10 minutes. Let cool.

Leave the oven set at 350°F. In a food processor fitted with the metal blade, combine the toasted almonds, Graham cracker crumbs and brown sugar. Process to grind finely. Add the melted butter and process until the crumbs begin to stick together. With your hand draped with plastic wrap to form a glove, press the crumbs firmly onto the bottom and two inches up the sides of a springform pan nine inches in diameter and 2 1/2 inches deep. Bake the crust for 10 minutes until set. Remove from the oven and let cool.

To make the filling, in a large bowl, combine the cream cheese, honey and granulated sugar. Using an electric mixer set on medium speed, beat until smooth and well blended. Beat in 1/2 cup of the cream, the lemon juice and almond extract until smooth. Place the water in a small saucepan. Sprinkle the gelatin over the top and let soften for five minutes. Place over low heat and stir until the gelatin dissolves. Gradually whisk in the remaining 1/2 cup cream. Then add the gelatin mixture to the cream cheese mixture and beat until fluffy, about one minute. Spoon the filling into the cooled crust. Cover with aluminum foil and refrigerate overnight or for up to two days.

To serve, run a knife around the pan sides to loosen the cake. Release the pan sides and place the cake on a plate.

In a small, heavy saucepan over medium heat, stir the apricot or peach jam until melted. Remove from the heat and let cool slightly. Arrange the nectarine slices atop the cake. Using a pastry brush, brush the jam over the fruit, then cut into wedges.

Serves 12. Makes one 9 inch cake.

Honey and Orange Madeleines

melted butter and flour for pan
2 eggs
1/3 cup (4 oz) honey
1/4 cup (2 oz) granulated sugar
1 1/2 tsp grated orange zest
1/8 tsp ground allspice
1/2 tsp vanilla extract
1 cup (4 oz) flour, sifted before measuring
3/4 cup unsalted butter, melted and cooled to lukewarm
granulated sugar or Vanilla Sugar

Preheat an oven to 400°F. Generously brush a 12-mold madeleine pan with melted butter; dust with flour.

In a large bowl, combine the eggs, honey, the 1/4 cup sugar, orange zest and allspice. Set over a saucepan of simmering water (the water must no touch the bowl) and whisk just until lukewarm.

Transfer the bowl to a work surface and, using an electric mixer set on high speed, beat until pale yellow, light, foamy and tripled in volume, about 10 minutes. Beat in the vanilla. Reduce the speed to low and gradually mix in the flour.

Transfer one-third of the batter to another bowl and gradually fold the melted butter into it (do not fold in the water that separates out at the bottom of the butter pan). Then gently fold the mixture into the remaining batter. Spoon into the prepared molds, filling almost to the top and using about half the batter.

Bake until golden brown and springy to the touch, about 12 minutes, rotating the pan 180 degrees halfway through baking. Immediately invert the pan onto a wire rack. Using a knife, gently pry out the cookies. Sprinkle with sugar or vanilla sugar. Wipe out the pan, bush with melted butter, dust with flour and repeat with the remaining batter. Let the cookies cool completely on the racks. Store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to three days.

Serves 12. Makes about two dozen.

Honey Anise Springerle

2 eggs
2/3 cup (5 oz) sugar
1/3 cup (4 oz) honey
1 tsp vanilla extract
1 tsp aniseeds
1/2 tsp grated orange zest
1/2 tsp grated lemon zest
about 2 3/4 cups (14 oz) flour
1 tsp baking powder
generous 1/4 tsp salt
Butter three large baking sheets.

In a bowl, using an electric mixer set on high speed, beat the eggs until very pale and airy, about three minutes. Gradually add the sugar and continue beating until the mixture drops from the beaters in a ribbon, about five minutes. Gradually beat in the honey, vanilla, aniseeds, and orange and lemon zests. In a sifter, combine the 2 3/4 cups flour, baking powder and salt. Sift the mixture directly onto the egg mixture and, using a rubber spatula, stir gently to incorporate the flour.

Transfer the dough to a lightly floured work surface and knead briefly. Roll out the dough into a rectangle about 1/4 inch thick. Lightly flour a rolling pin, then firmly but gently roll it over the dough. Cut into cookies and transfer the cookies to the prepared baking sheets. Gather up and reroll the scraps and cut out more cookies. Cover the baking sheets with plastic wrap and let stand overnight at cool room temperature. Preheat an oven to 300°F. Bake until lightly golden and very crisp, about 20 minutes, switching the pan positions halfway through. Transfer to racks and let cool completely.

Store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to two weeks.

Serves 36. Makes about six dozen cookies.

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Sth Brighton, Christchurch
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Contact: Don Stedman,
Ph/Fax: (03) 246-9777

TARANAKI AMATEUR BEEKEEPING CLUB
Phone: (06) 753-3320

WAIKATO BRANCH
Call Tony: (07) 856-9625

WAIRARAPA HOBBYIST BEEKEEPERS CLUB
Meet 3rd Sunday each month (except January) at Kites Woolstore, Norfolk Road, Masterton at 1.30pm.
Convener Arnold Esler.
Phone: (06) 379-8648

WELLINGTON BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION
Meets every second Monday of the month (except January) in Johnsonville. All welcome.
Contact: James Scott, 280 Major Drive, Kelson, Lower Hutt.
E-mail: JLscott@clear.net.nz

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