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The New Zealand BeeKeeper

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Permit

Beekeeping —the easy way

Brett Kindley, John Moffitt and Neisha Kindley enjoying a break at the Wairau River, Marlborough. This photo was taken by Daniel Iseli-Otto, a Canadian beekeeper working for South Branch Bees.

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Deadline for articles and advertising

April issue: 26 February 2009
(goes to all registered beekeepers in NZ)

May issue: 23 March

All articles/letters/photos to be with the Editor via fax, email or post:

Nancy Fithian
email: editor@nba.org.nz
(See page 2 for full details)

President's Report

Tutin regulations in force

The new tutin regulations have come into force and beekeepers in the risk areas will now have to deal with those requirements. Due to a number of excellent submissions to the NZFSA, the Authority has modified the regulations to allow for a range of options for risk management. This is quite clearly a move forward from the rather draconian initial proposals.

The NBA is now funding two students to do field surveys of tutu plants in the Coromandel/Bay of Plenty and Lower North Island to monitor the status of the hopper, honey bees and tutu honey dew. The surveys will be correlated with environmental data in an attempt to produce a predictive model to assist beekeepers in their risk management practices to prevent tutin poisoning. A number of beekeepers have volunteered their time and significant financial contributions to assist the study. Their contributions are gratefully accepted. This report is expected to be finalised in time for the six-month review.

An interesting aspect of the proposed tutin regulation was for the requirement to ensure that each batch of honey be homogenised to ensure that the sample was truly representative of that batch. Just before Christmas I received a newsletter from Airborne Honey, who discussed this issue in depth as they are having problems with drums of honey in some batches not being consistent with the samples. This has required further testing.

Especially with the thixotropic honeys, the speed at which the honey begins to partition itself out into various density gradients as the honey begins to become thixotropic again in the settling tank is quite amazing. Obtaining a truly representative sample of this sort of honey can be difficult at times.

The implication from this is that all extraction plants should take steps to ensure that each batch of honey is properly homogenised to ensure samples are truly representative. The cost to honey packers and exporters to further test honey because of these issues is passed on to producers in lower prices being paid.

Annual subscriptions due

Annual subscriptions are now due and it is pleasing to see that there is a good response by members. This has kept Pam Edwards busy over the last few weeks keeping up with the banking and membership cards. It would be nice if those members who haven't paid up do so as soon as possible.

Executive Council meetings

The Executive is having its next meeting in Christchurch on 20–21 February, followed by the AFB NPMS meeting on the 22nd. An invitation has been sent to local NBA members to attend an informal get-together to be held on the Friday evening.

Honey import review process

The honey import review process has moved forward with the establishment by MAF of the independent review panel. The members are David Oughten (Chair), Jay Evans (USA) and Janet Goff (Principal Policy Advisor, ERMA).

David Boldt reported that he had received 2357 pages immediately before Christmas, and that he and Dr Mark Goodwin were reviewing these as they prepared the NBA submissions to the panel by the end of January.

- Frans Laas

Tutin research project

Two researchers are currently surveying tutu. Joseph Edlin from Victoria University of Wellington is working in the Coromandel Peninsula and Bay of Plenty. Louisa Robertson from Massey University is working in the lower North Island.

The intention is to investigate whether a predictive model can be developed and used as a management tool to help beekeepers avoid the risk of honey containing tutin. We need a well-structured scientific study to provide robust data on which future tutin management and regulation can be based.

Joseph and Louisa are recording passion vine hopper (*Scolypopa*) population densities, the prevalence of honey dew and whether bees and wasps are present in the tutu. The survey will continue through January and February and Louisa will work on into March. The agreed route and sites are being covered on a weekly basis.

Joseph Edlin and Louisa Robertson.

Photos supplied by Joseph Edlin and Neil Farrer.

The information records will then be correlated with climatic data (temperature and rainfall) and tutin testing results from the areas under study.

We will be pleased to receive diarised records from beekeepers who have been observing the presence of the passion vine hopper and honey dew.

The findings will be reported in a paper which should be written before the six-month review of the NZFSA requirements.

The NBA is supporting this work using funds we have available for research. Financial support has also been requested from the Honey Packers and Exporters Association through the Bee Products Standards Council and the Honey Industry Trust. A number of beekeepers have contributed and further contributions will be gratefully accepted.

Thank you to Jane Lorimer, Pauline Bassett, Neil Farrer and Neil Mossop for assistance with planning this project. Other beekeepers involved will be acknowledged in due course.

- Jim Edwards
Chief Executive Officer

Tutu. Photos supplied by Neil Farrer.

NIWA's climate outlook: January to March 2009

In the New Zealand region, mean sea level pressures are likely to be higher than normal over southern New Zealand and to the east, with more easterly winds than normal over the North Island, and lighter winds than normal over the South Island.

Rainfall is likely to be normal or above normal in the north and east of the North Island, and below normal in much of the South Island. Normal soil moisture levels and river flows are likely in the North Island. Normal or below normal conditions are likely in the north of the South Island. Below normal conditions are likely in the remainder of the South Island.

Air temperatures over the country are likely to be above average in many areas.

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RADIO NEW ZEALAND NATIONAL

The Bee Team

In late December, NBA Chief Executive Officer Jim Edwards interviewed Simon Morton, who has been featuring beekeeping in his weekly Saturday programme 'This Way Up' on Radio New Zealand. The show's producers approached the NBA for information and meetings were held involving Jim, Executive Secretary Pam Edwards and Vice President Neil Farrer on behalf of the NBA. It quickly became apparent that there was a great opportunity to introduce beekeeping to the public, encouraging people to take greater interest in bees and maybe even start keeping their own bees.

Here is the text of Jim's interview with Simon.

What motivated you to look at a series on bees?

Richard Scott, who produces the show 'This Way Up' on Radio New Zealand National, came up with the idea following the huge success of the Funky Chicken Farm, where we set up a backyard chicken coop and started producing free-range eggs. 2008 saw huge increases in food costs and we were keen to highlight ways consumers could save money, and provide a practical guide for listeners to participate in an ongoing series. The rest of the media seems infatuated with reporting the doom and gloom and not offering any solutions or ideas.

Once we started researching the bee series we quickly realised there was a huge amount of potential programme content—from setting up a backyard hive to the economics of honey and commercial pollination services. The running of a beehive would springboard us into so many other bee-related areas, and we'd meet lots of bee people along the way.

What have been the challenges and satisfaction so far?

There really haven't been too many challenges so far, seeing as we enlisted the help of the NBA, plus we've been mentored by David Carleton and Frank Lindsay—two Wellington-based beekeepers. Working my hive on my own was a bit of a challenge as I got to grips with holding the frames correctly and staying calm and focused as I moved things around in the boxes.

It's been hugely satisfying—David Carleton helped me build the hives, then getting the kids to paint them and moving the nuc into the hive was great fun. I do find myself wandering down to the hive in the late afternoon with a cuppa: it's mesmerising to watch them coming back full of pollen and see the fresh bees departing for a forage.

Episode 3: Collecting the swarm. Simon looking worried. *Photo courtesy of Radio New Zealand National.*

How easy has it been to meet the local body and other (e.g., AFB NPMS registration) regulations?

At this stage pretty easy—a bit to do next year.

Who have you met and how have they helped?

Once we'd met with the NBA and explained the plan of attack we were introduced to David Carleton in Wellington. David has worked as a commercial beekeeper in the US and is passionate about bees. These days he helps 'new-bees' get going with their first hive and has overseen the whole project. We sourced our queen from Frank Lindsay—another bee guru, and Frank's visited the hive and has assisted with advice. He's a walking bee encyclopaedia and will hopefully be on the show next year.

How does this series rate against the Funky Chicken Farm?

The Backyard Bee Team has been more technical in terms of set up and procedure, as activity has been intense to start with as we got the hive going and then merged another swarm. Now that the honey flow is on it's a case of correctly moving the frames around and keeping an eye on space in the hive. We've already had eight episodes with the bees and I can't see an end at this stage, which is good. The main difference from the Funky Chicken Farm series we ran earlier this year is we're using the Backyard Bee Team to discuss and explore lots of bee-related issues, as there's a large pool of talented people either working with bees or researching areas related to bees and bee products. The significance of bees in our day-to-day lives, and some of the challenges that beekeepers face globally needs will feature more prominently in 2009, as will a more in-depth look at the honey industry, and if we're lucky we may even get a frame or two of our own!

What has been the response from those around you: family, friends, neighbours and workmates?

Response to the series has been very positive so far in terms of listener emails and general feedback from family and friends. My neighbours have been very supportive with everyone very enthused about having bees to pollinate gardens.

What is the longer term plan for the series and your own involvement in beekeeping?

There's no end date for the series at this stage, which is really exciting. The series will slow down over the winter as hive-related activity reduces, but this gives us the chance to look at other elements of bees and the bee economy—from medical research with manuka honey to beeswax candle making and the entomology of the bees. We're hoping to develop the website www.radionz.co.nz/thiswayup/bees so it can be used as a resource for new beekeepers.

Comment

The NBA is very grateful to Simon for his enthusiastic coverage of beekeeping. We hope that listeners will gain a new appreciation of the value of bees and that we will see a new influx of beekeepers. Better still, we hope that some of them will seriously consider making a career in beekeeping.

Botanica 2009

The Buzz on Bees, Butterflies, Bugs and Botanics

This exhibition will be staged at Science Alive, 392 Morehouse Avenue, Christchurch, as part of the 20th anniversary celebrations of the Festival of Flowers, commencing February 2009. The exhibition will run for three months (February, March, and April 2009) and therefore run through the period of the Ellerslie Garden Show in March.

This exhibition will showcase the science and technology of flowers and plants, and how important their pollination by bees, bugs, moths, butterflies and birds is to our survival. Gardening industry experts will be attending, and the eminent entomologist Ruud Kleinpaste will give a lecture series on the bug world.

Linda Newstrom-Lloyd from Landcare Research will be giving lectures on the different pollinators and their method of delivery. The Christchurch Hobbyist Bee Club will have a live display beehive, with supporting displays on how important bees are to the planet and how to keep them.

Every school in Canterbury will be invited to attend and advertisements will appear in the local papers. This should be a good opportunity to connect food with origins, not just the supermarket shelf.

These are just some of the types of things that will be happening with the support of the whole beekeeping industry. If you have suggestions and ideas that will help this exhibition, contact the writer (see page 2 for details) or Science Alive directly: www.sciencealive.co.nz

- Trevor Corbett

Update to Harvest Declaration & Statement of Transfer

Refer to NZFSA website:
http://www.nzfsa.govt.nz/animalproducts/publications/forms/bees/bees.htm
http://www.nzfsa.govt.nz/animalproducts/publications/omar/09-006.htm
These forms need to be used from 25.01.2009

Letters to the Editor

Apiaries Act Notice of Motion

Dear Editor,

I noticed in the December issue that the President has taken time to discuss his ruling regarding the Apiaries Act Notice of Motion presented at the last conference. Interesting that he did not cover other items raised at conference. Perhaps his conscience is pricking him because of the way he disallowed a show of hands, which was not democratic.

As far as the Apiaries Act goes, it had a number of good points that have lapsed when beekeeping was tacked onto the Animal Products Act. The then Minister told me that beekeeping was put in the Animal Products Act because it had to be put somewhere. Why wasn't it just left alone?

If the beekeeping industry collapsed, which is possible with more diseases on the horizon, then the lack of pollination could seriously affect both Animal Products and Horticultural Products, so perhaps we should reinstate the Apiaries Act and add Animal Products and Horticulture Products to that Act as somewhere to put them instead.

The President obviously has preconceived ideas about the content of the proposed Apiaries Act, but surely the details are still to be determined in the new Act.

An effective Act could probably give our industry more protection against imported diseases, dangerous insecticides, etc.

I am certain I could work out a suitable system of traceability that is more user friendly than what we have now.

Yours,
Gary Jeffery
Mountain Beech Apiaries Ltd.

More on the tutin debate

I refer to the "Tutin Debate" portion of the President's Report in the December 2008 edition.

In the alternatives discussed, the President's summation for having tutu declared a noxious weed and eradicated is: "not an option". No supporting facts, no rationale, just simply "No". Perhaps that conclusion has been drawn through naiveté but I think the beekeeping community deserves better from its cornerstone representative. I am horrified the President has chosen to side with the option promoted by NZFSA (i.e., honey testing), which places a greater cost and time imposition on beekeepers than anything else.

Firstly, the word "eradication" needs to be clarified. It does NOT mean the destruction of every last tutu bush from the landscape. We all know that's impossible. It is about a comprehensive programme of control and decimation of the plant to levels where it will not pose a threat of honey contamination, especially during high-risk climatic conditions.

All of the regional councils (except Westland) have in place a Pest Plant Management Strategy, to which tutu could be added as a "total control" pest plant. Such plants are poisoned using recognised methods, at intervals that ensure their infestations are controlled, reduced and eventually "eradicated". Total Control Pest Plants are banned from sale, propagation, distribution and exhibition throughout the region and landowners/occupiers are encouraged to notify the regional councils of their presence. Councils also disseminate technical advice and information about these plants. These strategies also have built in enforcement measures and penalties for non-compliance. They have superseded the old Noxious Weeds Act of 1950, and the most important change is that public land MUST also comply.

In addition, there is the National Pest Plant Accord convened by MAF Biosecurity. It is an agreement between MAF Biosecurity, the regional councils and the New Zealand Nurserymen's Association, and further strengthens the banning from sale, propagation, distribution and exhibition of certain plants.

These measures would give added impetus to the already very successful harvest restraints that take place in recognised high-risk areas. As the number of tutu bushes in those areas declines over time there would be less necessity for the restraints, giving beekeepers more freedom to place their hives and take off honey anywhere, anytime. We will be able to use efficiently existing structures to remove the contamination problem rather than having to invent and pay dearly for yet another layer of bureaucracy as NZFSA proposes.

Some people have expressed doubt over having a native plant declared a noxious weed. A quick perusal of the First Schedule of the old Noxious Weeds Act shows that such a precedent has already been set. Furthermore, if the public only knew of the toxic dangers tutu carries for humans and livestock (not just through honey), any reservations would soon be erased.

Yours sincerely,
Mark Horsnell
Sunrise Apiaries Ltd.

[Editor's note: NBA President Frans Laas will respond to both of these letters in the March issue.]

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Continued from page 9

International Trader Of The Year

New Zealand Honey Specialities Ltd is delighted to announce its success at the prestigious 2008 Otago Chamber of Commerce, business excellence awards recently held in Dunedin, where we won the "International Trader of the Year" award.

The winning of this prestigious export award has capped off a very successful period for us. Since our products first went on shelf in the United Kingdom, only 18 months ago, they are now sold in over 1,200 supermarkets and health stores in the United Kingdom, Hong Kong and New Zealand.

The winning of this award and the progress we have made would not have been possible without the support from all the people and companies whom we have worked with over the last 2 years. We would like to take this opportunity to thank you and your company for your support and look forward to working closely with you now and in the future.

Below is a link to an article recently published in the *Otago Daily Times* about the exciting developments we are helping create in the New Zealand honey business:
http://www.odt.co.nz/news/business/33029/exploiting-southern-honey039s-prized-qualities

Kindest regards,
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New Zealand Honey Co.
E-mail: chris.mcelroy@newzealandhoneyco.com

Good news for future NBA conferences

The NBA has received a cheque for $10,000 from the Southern North Island Branch, which is to be held in a special account to be used by branches to assist with travel and accommodation for overseas speakers for Annual Conference.

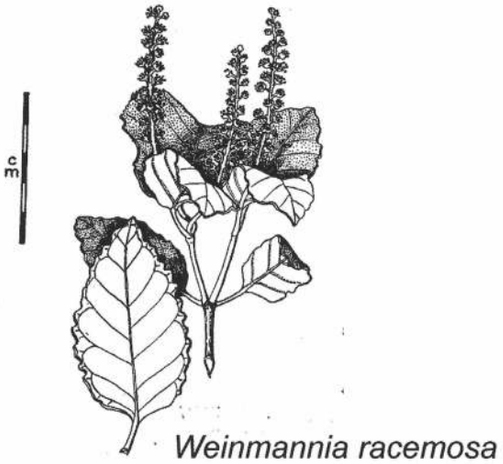
The money is to be used as a loan from the NBA and is to be refunded after each conference.

On repayment to the NBA, the branch using the money will hopefully add a little to it, so eventually the NBA has a self-funding scheme that is used to bring overseas speakers to future NBA conferences.

A big thank you from all NBA members to the Southern North Island Branch for their generosity, which will help to ensure that there are top international speakers at all future conferences.

- Pam Edwards
Executive Secretary

Trees and Shrubs of New Zealand



Weinmannia racemosa

Weinmannia racemosa

Maori name: Kamahi

The kamahi is a round-headed tree up to 2.5 metres tall. The leaves are opposite three to eight centimetres long, serrated and dull green in colour.

The flowers are white in racemes two to 10 centimetres long, blooming from November to January.

The tree is found throughout New Zealand and is very common in the forests of Westland.

The honey of kamahi is probably the worst-flavoured honey in New Zealand, being bitter which accentuates with age, the colour being light amber (with a pale greenish tint). The pollen is whitish.

The early settlers used the bark of the kamahi for tanning leather, the tree having a 30% tannin content. Bark was exported at one time for this reason. The Maori used the bark to dye cloaks and mats. The wood of the kamahi was also used to make a 'jigger' for fishing for barracouta.

- Tony Lorimer

The towai or taiwhero (Weinmannia silvicola) *is related to but often mistaken for the kamahi. Photo: Frank Lindsay.*

From the colonies

Auckland Branch

Hello from the Auckland branch; welcome to the New Year. Sorry for not providing a report in the December issue: I was enjoying a break after swarming season. I don't do pollination like a lot of you, so I can only report on apiaries in the area. As Auckland feels so large, I can only say about my region that most if not all pollination colonies are back from kiwifruit and colonies are well supered up. The manuka/kanuka has had the most brilliant flowering I have seen since I started a few years ago.

The Auckland weather has been very fickle this season, raining close to every third day.

I have received the new Tutin Compliance Guide in the mail: interesting reading, isn't it?

Well, it's time to get honey off—beehave all.

-Terry McColl

Bay of Plenty Branch

It's mid-January with warm sunny days and fish still on the bite, so it's hard to drag ourselves away to the pressing issue of honey. Luckily the night fishing is quite good at the moment.

In the spring we noticed that the flowering pattern was variable and short, and this pattern seems to have continued through the pohutukawa, manuka and kanuka flowering, giving what appears to be a variable crop. A late clover flow may be the saving grace.

Mite numbers currently appear to be where they should be but the time for vigilance is approaching, and I continue to live in hope that people will be responsible and apply miticides correctly.

Conference update

Conference planning has taken a back seat in the last few weeks but about to get ramped up, so we will be able to bring you a programme in the near future. Currently we have a number of interesting speakers who are keen and many sponsors confirmed. Comvita, FMG, Ceracell, Ecroyd's, Tunnicliffes, Beegreen, Beetek, CAL Commercial Autos (Isuzu Hamilton), HP Industries, NZ Honey Producers Cooperative, Seeka, Aqua Rain and Leafscreen have all confirmed their support for conference, so please support them. More sponsors are in the pipeline, as we plan to have a range of support activities and products in the sponsors' area.

The broad outline for conference is:

Sunday 7 June: New and small beekeepers' forum, plus specialty group meetings and outside forum.
Monday 8 June: PMS and seminars plus outside forum and sponsors' night
Tuesday 9 June: Seminar day and conference dinner
Wednesday 10 June: Field trip to Comvita; AGM of the NBA
Thursday 11 June: Field trip to Comvita; AGM of AMHA.

Look forward to seeing you all there; meanwhile, hope the honey season is productive and that the difficulties of the world economy has the positive effect of people eating more honey.

- Barbara Pimm, Branch Secretary

Hawke's Bay Branch

Large areas of Hawke's Bay are suffering from drought; in other areas it is raining every second day. The places that fall somewhere between these two extremes are not doing too badly.

Despite checking over a fairly large area I have yet to see a single passion vine hopper (yes, I do know what they look like). Many people will be finding the same thing but I suppose if it stops someone being poisoned it will be worth it. Personally I believe monitoring at source is far more useful and economical than end product testing.

I have seen two bad cases of varroa this year. The first was in hives with Bayvarol strips in: they had obviously been there for between one and two years and were having no effect (surprise, surprise) after this time. I considered talking to the owner but decided in the end it was probably better that the hives died out. The PMS in these hives were so bad that was almost impossible to check for foulbrood and they were within a few days of dying. The second case involved hives that had been treated with the right number of strips but they were weak divisions, and the strips were nowhere near the bees or the brood and consequently had had no effect at all on varroa numbers. Varroa strips do cause the bees not to raise brood in their immediate area. Get over it—is better to have a couple of patchy frames of brood than hives dying of varroa.

Good luck for the New Year and for those in the South Island faced with the imminent prospect of varroa, get a cappings pricker and keep an eye on your drone brood.

– John Berry, Branch President

Nelson Branch

As I write at the end of December, it is too early to anticipate what the actual honey flow will be like this year. Many reports from the earlier manuka flowering in the Marlborough Sounds indicates that the manuka is flowering quickly and sporadically, so we probably can't hope for the same good season that we had last year.

But having said that, we have had much more early summer rain than usual and mixed with some warmth and sunshine, there is a great deal of clover around. It's flowering later and

longer, so has been a good build up to manuka flowering and also has given the hives good stores. Normally at this time of the year, everything is brown and dried off. We are very green and every few days the lawns still need cutting.

This year, there has been a lot less talk of varroa and its scourges compared to this time last year. There is more talk about the NZFSA tutin regulations and we thank the Marlborough Group for their submission to NZFSA. In the final draft, the honey to be tested for the top of the South Island has been reduced to a risk area in the Marlborough Sounds. The first draft NZFSA produced would have required testing for all honey produced in the top of the South Island.

- Merle Moffitt

Canterbury Branch

I hope this finds everyone well and in good spirits after the Christmas and New Year break. It's always good to catch up with family and friends. Pity we don't make the effort more often but we, at least, seem to working harder and harder just to stand still.

I often wonder what it must be like keeping bees in the Northern Hemisphere without the holiday interruption in the middle of the busy season. Probably would end up being one long slog so perhaps the enforced break is good for us.

Reports on the season in Canterbury to date seem to reveal a below-average season, and with the nor'west winds kicking in lately and pastures burning off, the season at this point looks about over for most of us.

I will remember this season as having the most difficult spring in memory (access to sites with the ground being so wet), then October and November being the driest on record. The saving grace this year was the fact that what rain did come came just (and I mean just) in time without the usual nor'west winds. The rapid increase in the amount of irrigation in Canterbury will also have had a bearing; however my experience is that most pasture is over-irrigated with cold water, preventing soil temperatures to rise to a level that is really conducive to nectar secretion.

- Brian Lancaster

Otago Branch

By all accounts Otago is having a great beekeeping year. After a dry and worrying November we have been blessed with some good summer rains. With more than enough heat the viper's bugloss and clover have responded well and Central Otago especially is a blaze of colour. The thyme, kamahi and other bush crops seemed fairly average but bees are now enjoying a very good summer flow. As a result I would expect at least an average crop for most. There will be some hot and weary but hopefully happy beekeepers by the end of the season.

An interesting discovery for me this season was identifying a handy November honey source. In the dry eastern hills the grey scrub communities often yield a very strong tasting amber-coloured honey. It is valuable to bees between the spring flows and the start of the clover. At this time the matagouri flowers and I have in the past associated this honey source with it. Curiously though, while the plant is in flower, I just couldn't see any bees on it. Closer inspection this year found the buzzing matagouri scrub to have a flowering creeper within it. This native plant, *Scandia geniculata*, grows in both islands and a good description can be found at the New Zealand Plant Conservation Network website: http://www.nzpcn.org.nz/vascular_plants/detail.asp?PlantID=807

I collected flowers and honey and Michael Wraight did an analysis. He found an amazing 98% Scandia pollen in the honey so that's the stuff all right! I am assured matagouri does produce nectar but my bees certainly sought out the other tiny flowers in preference. A challenge to the taste buds but I am glad they like it; thyme is mild in comparison!

I wish you all a successful start to 2009. We may need it!

- Peter Sales, Branch Secretary

Chatham Islands

Since the re-establishment of beekeeping on the island the last six weeks have been busy and exciting. At Christmas get-togethers, locals have wanted to talk bees:

"Can you put a hive in my back yard?"

"I have planted x hectares of clover and lucerne that need pollinating."

"We are carrying out research into biofuel and would like some hives to pollinate the crop."

"I have an old island recipe for honeyed whiskey that will tremble your eyelids and womble your knees."

Fortunately we have been able to accommodate the growing raft of requests but demand has certainly stretched our meagre resource (40 hives). We will begin to rectify that situation in the months and years ahead and to succeed it is necessary to keep the island free of varroa and AFB.

It has been great to work with new island beekeepers to get their hives up and honeying. Their shiny new gear is now

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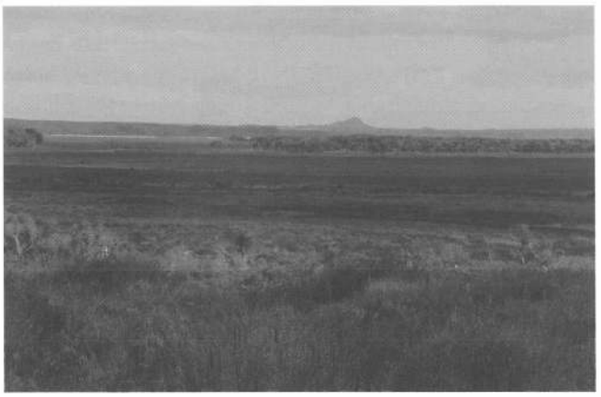
dirty and they have had their first taste of honey off the end of the hive tool. This New Year's weekend we have put on the first honey supers. Most of the paddocks around have enough patches of clover and maku (yellow clover) from which the bees are able to gather nectar and pollen supplies are plentiful.

We took a day off recently and spent it at Te Awapatiki, situated on the eastern side of the main island where the Te Whanga Lagoon (46,000 acres) opens to the sea. Here we gathered cockles for lunch and tried to spear flounder and catch fish from the sea.



This is the view on the way to our picnic spot. We travelled by 4x4 wheel drive trucks across dried peat land. In the winter the route is quad-bog heaven.

This is the picnic spot. The day camp is being set up by local members of the Chatham Cabernet, (right to left): Ron 'Kirk', Rana 'Clarke', Deborah 'Tizard' and Mana 'Keys' for a buffet of freshly cooked cockles on buttered bread, pan-fried flounder and perhaps a surf-casting catch (e.g., crab weed salad).

The cockle gatherers with Mana 'Keys' demonstrating the knee down method. The fish spear is ready for action should a whale surface in the background. Lots of cockles were gathered and when lightly poached they are juicy eating.

The tree pictured (foreground) is Chatham akeake. The olds have said Chatham akeake honey has a goldish tint, whereas Chatham tarahina honey is the colour of pink champagne. In the next two years we are looking forward to unbundling the unique factors that identify Chatham honey.

After lunch we climbed the hill to look across the lagoon towards Te Matarae in the background. Six weeks ago there was only one surviving hive left at Matarae. Since then five new ones have been established. Mana and I currently manage and maintain these hives for the local mayor.

Having recently entertained the Governor-General of New Zealand, in February 2009, our island kingdom is looking forward to hosting a Presidential visit from the NBA. I am busy putting together a varied programme for Frans Laas to teach queen bee rearing and hive inspection. Frans has offered to demonstrate how to hunt wild cattle (American longhorn) while the rest of the island bolts for the relative safety of the tallest tree.

I am pleased to report that one of our new beekeepers has enrolled at Telford for the distance beekeeping course. We wish her well.

Lots of joy for the new honey season,

- Michele Andersen and Mana Cracknell
Rekohu – Chatham Islands

About the Apiary

January and February are extraction months. The only thing I would like to emphasise is that honey is a food and you should practice strict hygiene procedures.

We have been perhaps a bit more fortunate than other areas of New Zealand. Normally the honey flow would have finished by February and the pasture would have dried off, but not this year. With all the rain we have received through December and January, the white flowering heads of clover are everywhere in paddocks that have been cut for hay. Pohutukawa, catsear and lotus major have also had a long flowering. There's so much nectar available that hives which had swarmed earlier have built up again and are now bringing in a crop.

The honey crop

Most beekeepers will be taking off honey, extracting it and putting the wet supers back on the hives for the bees to clean up. If we are lucky, the bees might store another super of honey for us.

In an urban area it's very important that you do not upset the hive and cause your neighbours to get stung. Before opening the hive, smoke the bees and allow a couple of minutes before opening the hive for the bees to react to the smoke; they tend to fill up on honey and become easily controllable. I recommend that you use escape boards to clear the bees from the honey supers. These can be put on in the late afternoon and by early morning the majority of the bees will have cleared the super(s). Early morning smoke the hive, remove the supers and brush or shake out the remaining bees in front of the hive.

Escape boards don't work well when the hive is completely full of bees. There is nowhere for them to go so they stay in the super. If your hives are full of bees put an empty super on top of the brood nest and immediately under the escape boards. This should clear the congestion problem.

During the middle of January, I continued my rounds of checking hives to see if any needed another super. I lifted the crown board up slightly and looked at the frames in the top super. If the bees were only working the middle three frames, the crown board was carefully put back down and the roof replaced. If the bees had built out five or more frames, I placed another three-quarter-depth super on top.

I have been putting on a lot of new (waxed) plastic frames to get drawn out, which is quite a task for some hives. The bees manage to draw out most of the frames but not the outside ones, so I have been moving the capped frames to the outside and placing the undrawn frames into the centre. It's easier for the bees to maintain a constant temperature in the centre of the super and this will help the bees to draw the remaining frames. It also stimulates the bees to keep bringing in nectar.

During December very strong hives were drawing out a super a week (in the middle of the main flow) but were also putting nectar into empty brood cells along the top of the brood frames, which gradually compresses the queen's laying into the bottom super and then into only five frames. These hives had filled three three-quarter-depth honey supers plus most of the two bottom brood supers. Bee numbers have reduced so they now only occupied the bottom two supers and are basically ready to winter down. The problem being that winter is three months away. Our region doesn't dry out, so generally, warm moist conditions continue. This produces a dribble of a nectar flow from ground sources reflowering, which stimulates the bees into brood rearing again: they can easily consume most of what I have termed "winter stores" before winter, turning it into bees. Yes, we want at least a super and a half of new bees to winter over with, but we also need a super of honey stores so the bees can start using it once the queen starts laying again in July. (Year-old queens will have a short brood break in winter but autumn queens tend to continue to raise brood all the way through the year.)

One beekeeper got over this problem of the bees eating their reserves early by removing the honey crop, but also stored the second brood super in a separate 20-foot (six metre) container. Once the bees used the honey in the bottom super, they basically went on a starvation diet, just living on what was coming in, so stopped brood rearing. As soon as the nights cooled, he would put the second honey super back on each hive. Therefore he had a super of bees plus one of honey going into winter.

I found another way of achieving this aim but it's not recommended. I was late putting strips into a couple of apiaries last year so varroa reduced the hives' strength to five frames of nuclei. They started building up again once I applied treatment but generally if you live in a cold region, these small hives will not survive the winter.

Commercial beekeepers tend to strip out the honey above the second super and if it's used before winter, top up the stores by sugar feeding.

Varroa treatment

Honey should be off by the end of February to get the varroa treatments under way. Coordinate your treatments with other beekeepers in the area to reduce the chance of immediate reinvasion from managed hives.

Another thing you must consider: it's been a good swarming season so there are a lot of feral hives out there that will break down from May onwards. This could mean you may have to apply another treatment in May. Beekeepers will need to monitor varroa levels in their hives. You can't do this by just looking at a hive. We all should have a method to determine mite levels accurately within our hives. I'm not a fan of the sugar shake method unless you do this three of four times, as you are only sampling one percent of your bees each time. Better to dig brood out with a cappings scratcher and count mites. There are other methods: check your guide *Control of Varroa* by Dr Mark Goodwin and Michelle Taylor (available from the NBA).

New beekeepers

This year a number of new beekeepers started off with four-frame nucleus hives and quite a few of these swarmed. Some haven't and are now two or three supers high. It's been a very good long nectar flow. The last of the flows in this area are from koromiko and pennyroyal but we can get a repeat of catsear and clover if we get another spell of solid rain.

Swarming started in the Wellington district in late September and it's still going. This is unusual as once the nectar flow starts the bees forget about swarming and get on with bringing in nectar. It didn't seem to matter how big or small the hive was, hives quickly filled up with nectar and off went the bees—very disappointing.

So where did we go wrong? Generally, swarming is due to an imbalance between young and older bees around the brood nest. I have been informed by older and wiser beekeepers that swarming preparations start when the bees start storing nectar above the brood, which concentrates the queen's brood laying downwards. The hive can't expand, becomes congested, the bees extend the queen cell cups and before long, the queen will start to lay an egg in each. If you don't spot all the queen cells during your 10-day quick inspection (and some are hard to see, especially those tucked along, up under the bottom bars), off go the bees with the old queen and you basically lose your honey crop.

The best way to keep the bees expanding upwards is to keep putting the odd foundation frame into the middle of the brood nest. While bees are building wax, they forget about swarming. The only problem is that this year the bees have been drawing out frames within a couple of days, and therefore it's been quite hard to prevent swarming.

All we can do is remember this and next year, have a supply of foundation frames ready—or perhaps remove and extract the fully capped frames of honey as the bees complete them. But then again, next year could be completely different and might not be as good as this year. Frustrating, isn't it?

Queen rearing

February is also a very good time to requeen your hives. We basically need four things for good queen matings:

1. daytime temperatures above 20 degrees C
2. good pollen available
3. a dribble of nectar coming into the hives, and
4. plenty of drones in the hives. At least half a frame of drones a month old from hives whose queens are not related to the colony you intend to use as a breeder.

You also have the option of either buying mated queens or, if you are very close to a queen producer, buying 10-day-old queen cells.

When requeening I recommend that you always make up nucleus hives and introduce the new queens into them. Being made up mostly of young bees, you get more successful introductions. Once the new queen has been laying in the nuc for a month, find and dispatch the old queen (don't try and catch her, just flick her off the frame on to the ground and stand on her, or slice her through with a hive tool), then put the nucleus hive into the centre of a full-depth super and place it on top of the now-queenless hive between two sheets of newspaper. The bees will chew through the paper and unite successfully.

Commercial beekeepers purchase 10-day-old queen cells, protect them with tape or a piece of irrigation hose (to stop the bees tearing down cells by chewing through the side of the cell), and put one into the third or fourth super of each hive where there are enough bees to look after her. In a couple of days the queen emerges, has a good feed of pollen and nectar and when she comes across another queen they fight. The virgin, being smaller and not encumbered with an abdomen full of eggs, usually wins the fight 80 percent of the time. Within two or three days, she will go out and mate with up to 20 drones that we hope aren't related to her, find her way home and then after another three days will start to lay eggs.

Seems straightforward, but it doesn't always work out like that. Tui are plentiful around Wellington and they eat bees. (My son observed scout bees investigating an air grate in his garage, being caught and eaten by a tui.) Hives close together or painted the same colour could make it difficult for the queen to orientate and find her way home again. (Often the hive next door gets requeened instead.) Sometimes both queens die after fighting, hence it's best to also make up a number of extra nucleus hives as back up to unite to those hives that fail to requeen.

So what can a hobbyist do if he or she wants to raise their own queen(s)? Make up a four-frame nucleus colony consisting of two frames of brood (one of these must have eggs), a frame of honey and another of pollen and honey.

Take the frame with eggs and, using the blunt end of a pencil, enlarge three or four cells that have eggs in them. Ideally these should be located towards the top-middle of the frame but if not, anywhere that is covered by bees should be OK. The eggs should be on a lean or flatten out, indicating that they are about to hatch. After doing this, take a fork or hive tool and mash up some of the pollen cells and honey cells to make the pollen into a runny paste and dribble this over the tops of the frames, then close up the hive.

It's best to move this nucleus hive away from the original location as some of the field bees will return to the original hive, thus weakening the nuc. If you can't do this, tape a piece of wind mesh across the front of the nuc hive so that the bees can't fly but are able to ventilate the hive. Place the nuc hive in the shade for two days, then set out in your garden well off the ground. Replace the mesh with a little grass so they have to force their way out. This will make the bees orientate to the new site.

After three days inspect the nuc hive and see if the cell you expanded has been drawn out and has a big blob of royal jelly

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under the larva. If not, inspect the brood frames and look for queen cells started by the bees themselves. If they haven't done either, look for eggs—you could have inadvertently moved the queen into the nuc by mistake. If they have started their own queen cells, rub them out unless they are in a patch of very tiny larvae and start again with another frame with eggs. Sometimes it takes one or two goes for the bees or you to get it right. A four-frame nuc hive, full of bees, can produce five or six good long queen cells. If you want more cells then you should set up a special nuc and learn to 'graft' larvae into queen cell cups.

Basically it's the same set up but this time the brood frames should be all sealed brood and you place the queen cell cups on a frame between these. There's a technique to grafting. Use a Chinese grafting tool. They are inexpensive and easy to use. You have to learn to pick up the tiniest larva (less than 24 hours old) and place it in the cell cup without rolling it or damaging it in any way as they are very fragile. Preparation is the main thing. Feed both hives sugar syrup and lots of mashed-up pollen so the nurse bees are producing copious quantities of royal jelly. The tiny larvae will be floating on a lot of royal jelly, which makes them easier to pick up.

Inspect the queen cell bar again a couple of hours after grafting. Those larvae that have been accepted will have a pool of royal jelly in the bottom of the cell and the cell rim will have started to be extended with new wax. Regraft those cells that have been rejected and try again. It may take you a couple attempts before you get it right. Just make sure when re-grafting that you use the tiniest larvae. Older larvae will mean these will emerge before the others and they will kill the other pupating queen cells. Ensure you are very careful handling the queen cells (discard any you drop). You can put individual queen (protected) cells into nucs you have made up the day before.

Things to do this month

Check for AFB before removing any honey. Extract honey, remove comb honey (as soon as it's capped to prevent travel stain), rear autumn queens, introduce purchased queens, and produce replacement nuclei. Put on entrance closures to make the hive easier to defend. Don't allow robbing to start when the flow finishes by leaving honey exposed or leaving hives open too long. Estimate varroa numbers and treat hives that are reaching the threshold.

Keep an eye out for wasps: last autumn a lot of beekeepers lost hives to them.) Nests are in ditches and in banks usually within 500 metres. Kill them with a little insecticide powder down the entrance before they start producing new queens.

- Frank Lindsay

Don't forget to inspect brood for AFB before removing honey.

The African (killer) bee survival guide

Early on in my life I found myself as a conscript in a guerrilla warfare situation in the triangle formed by the borders of Mozambique, Malawi and Zambia.

Some of the most dramatic events that the combat group of which I was a member encountered during the entire time of duty in that area were actually caused not by man, but by enraged swarms of bees. Nothing had prepared me, or the other men for the totally murderous intent of these sudden and brutal attacks.

As a child I used to watch my mother's annual opening of our "kitchen" hives, which was executed without much ado or protection. Actually, in all, it was a quiet placid or "civilised" affair. Perhaps a better description would be a happy ritual on sharing Nature's magnanimity.

I must mention that those hives were cylindrical of about 1 x 0.5m and were made out of solid pieces of cork oak's bark *(quercus suber)*.

The story is quite different in Africa. At about noon on a warm winter's day, one moment we were following in a single file through miombo forest and the next there was chaos resulting from what seemed to be a massive grenade that had exploded amongst us. The difference between the real army weapon and this one was that there was hardly any noise and the "shrapnel" was made up of swarms of insects from hell. Suddenly we were fighting for sheer survival.

Our usual technique of fighting it out in ambushes or even splintering in all directions did not help us much either, as most of us had almost immediately acquired a personal cloud of enraged bees that were dive bombing our heads.

Luckily there was a fellow among us who could make instant decisions and would not lose his composure in the most trying of situations. On top of that it just happened that he was one of the few that had been spared the attack. Out of the pandemonium his voice rang out quite clear, shouting at us to stay where we were and to cover ourselves with our blankets. In reality most couldn't hear him above the mayhem of shouts and screams, or even worse, our personal panic.

Besides shouting instructions, he also led by example in a most laudable manner and in no time, others followed his example.

With outstretched arms holding a blanket that was flying over him, he ran to another man who was being so seriously stung that by then had lost his self-control, and wrapped it tightly around both of them.

In no time there were pairs of men lying about on the ground while embracing each other as tight as they could, so that they would make themselves as small as possible. Male bonding at its best, one might say. Most probably this attack may have been aggravated by the serious body odour that emanated from some thirty men that hadn't been close to water for a week.

Some years later on a national conference about bees that I attended, an overseas guest speaker did mention, to my great amazement, about the hyper defensive tendencies manifested by bees in that same part of the world.

What is interesting is that in the same general area there were two other types of honey bees, although quite different, as these were not only much smaller and placid, but actually stingless.

Stingless or not, they could still be a huge nuisance, especially the tiny black ones, which tried to take any fluid they could find from our eyes, nose or mouth. Their hive was always underground and the few ounces of honey one may encounter there was actually quite good. If I am not wrong, in South Africa they are called "mopane" bees.

The other type of stingless bees was a lot bigger, more rare and made their nests in holes in trees. From what I could gather, its honey was highly sought after, not only for its quality, but also for the easiness in raiding their hives. Perhaps these facts may explain their small numbers.

The world of the bees is a world of smells. Pheromones, if you like.

Queens control all workers' actions. There is a coterie of bees that follow every queen's move and whose main job seems to be, besides feeding the queen, to spread her smelling (pheromone) instructions throughout the hive.

With their very keen sense of smell the workers not only find food, but also discover intruder bees and other insects, or potential threats from larger predators around their hives.

According to fairly new research, bees can be trained in ten minutes to detect explosives in land mines or bombs in luggage at airports. By comparison, dogs take no less than three months to learn the same job.

Not much would happen if my mother was stung a couple of times while raiding our hives other than some local swelling. The reason for it is that honey bees are not programmed to react to the pheromones contained in their attacking weapon.

As you may have learned in previous newsletters, normally it takes only eight stings for a person to become immune to bee venom, even if these had occurred over some years. It should be mentioned that true serious allergic reactions are very rare and are suffered by less than 1% of the population.

The exception is *Apis mellifera scutellata*, better known as the African yellow bee, or "killer bee" as named by the Americans.

As mentioned previously, the theory of evolutionism may also apply here. Basically, the more aggressive the predators are, the more defensive you have to become if your species is to live on. For a species to survive relentless and brutal depredation, in this particular case of bees by man, it has to adapt and ultimately develop its own means of self-protection.

As a beekeeper I do get stung quite often and so far do not swell that much anymore. But as soon as the first sting strikes home, I not only notice the bitter almond smell of it very clearly in the air, I also can taste it in the mouth.

For certain the bees can smell it much better than I do. Immediately it has the effect of raising their alarm bells, as well as blowing the trumpet call for a charge. These acts are not only committed by the guards, but by other bees as well that happen to be near the hive's entrance at that given time, and will target anyone in its proximity.

The more stings they place, the more pheromones concentration in the air and logically the more mayhem at hand.

If it happens that cats, dogs, horses, cows and even humans, lions or elephants for that matter are unable to run away or find shelter in a dark place, the prognosis will not be good at all.

Literally, and in the same way as humans react in many societies, they can't stop themselves once aroused to the same insane moods of a riotous mob.

There is a proper formula about how many stings per kilo a victim can normally withstand. For adult humans it is something like 250 (3 per kg). Considering that the population in a good size hive could be around 60,000 bees, one can arrive at that critical number fairly quickly.

Death of a beekeeper

Very recently it appeared in the news the very sad story of a beekeeper that died while trying to remove a swarm in Pretoria. Some facts about it have now come to light.

- He was still a trainee and without a licence.
- He had health problems. (A beekeeper has to be a healthy person. A good heart is a must to withstand regular or even serious bee venom intakes into one's system.)
- He tried to remove a massive swarm during daylight hours (1600 hours).
- Not only that, but in a built up area.
- His protective gear was defective. (Bees were found inside the veil.)
- He was probably prone to panic reactions. (When he was found after the attack his hands were out of the gloves and as expected, stung on a massive scale.)

How to avoid being stung

- Disturbing bees in a strong hive by knocking on it, for instance, will cause an immediate and general attack. It will be perceived by the bees as an attack by a dangerous predator.
- "Hanging" around strong hives particularly on hot days should be avoided, as bees become quite irritable in these conditions. The opposite is also true, as bees are unable to fly below 8 degrees Celsius.
- Only in exceptional situations should one work on hives or remove strong swarms during the day, especially

in residential areas or whenever there are people or animals around.

- Perfumes, strong body odours and the smell of freshly cut grass seems to be offensive to bees and the cause of most unprovoked attacks.
- After a person spends some time inside the 3 to 4 m radius around a hive, a guard may buzz around the intruder's face as a warning to move off (usually twice). Normally, if the warning has not been heeded by then, the next contact would consist of an outright attack.
- Avoid wearing dark colours around strong hives.

What to do when a swarm attacks

- Please remember to keep your wits about you. Panic doesn't help at all, and I am quite sure that they can also smell fear the same as dogs, or lions for that matter.
- At the very first sting a person should move quickly away from the proximity of the hive, and if possible while trying to remove the sting by lifting it with a finger nail. Putting some saliva on it should help a bit. (When there isn't an actual beehive in the next 10 or so metres, a sting should not cause a major problem besides some allergic reactions).
- Trying to escape by running away through open fields is a no hoper, as African bees may keep the attack up for 2 km and even further on occasion.
- From personal experience, the best is to seek shelter in a dark room (with closed doors if possible). If not available, try to dodge around and through bushes and small trees while keeping a good pace and following a general direction. Cars (with closed windows) have literally saved my skin quite a number of times.
- Never jump into a pool trying to escape if there are no reeds or pipes to breathe through. Bees will just hover above the water while waiting for you to come up.
- Applying propolis tincture to stings does help.
- Anti-histamine is recommended.
- An adrenaline injection is a must for very allergic sufferers.
- If an adrenaline injection cannot be immediately administered, the patient should be taken to a clinic with utmost urgency.

Bee venom does have excellent medicinal properties, especially for auto-immune problems. (See "Bee Venom" in "Medicine from the Bees" in www.thehoneybear.co.za)

Source: Written by Kim Morgado of Johannesburg, South Africa for The Honey Bear 'Of Bees & Honey' newsletter, November 2008. Thanks to Neil Furness for providing a copy.

Massive crackdown on the use of scores of toxic pesticides

New EU rules, opposed by Gordon Brown, will phase out use of cancer-causing compounds in Britain

by Geoffrey Lean

Britain is to get its toughest crackdown on toxic substances in food and the environment, despite determined resistance to the safety measures from Gordon Brown.

The pesticide regulations will provide better protection for bees, whose numbers have fallen alarmingly across Europe. Scores of pesticides suspected of causing cancer, DNA damage and "gender-bender" effects are to be phased out under new EU rules, which are being hailed as a revolution in the way the public is protected against poisonous chemicals.

The use of all pesticides in public places is to be dramatically reduced, with aerial spraying banned anywhere in the country.

Yesterday environmentalists hailed the measures—to be adopted following long negotiations between the European Parliament and individual governments—as a "landmark", while the National Farmers' Union called them "devastating". The agrochemical industry has bitterly resisted them, backed by the Prime Minister, who has voiced his concern that they would damage agriculture and food production without significantly benefiting health or the environment.

Almost half of all food eaten throughout Europe has been discovered to be contaminated by pesticides, with six of the most dangerous substances among the 10 most frequently found.

The European Parliament has long been pressing, with strong cross-party support, for radical controls, despite opposition from some governments, especially Britain. The new measures are the result of a compromise between the two sides, hammered out last week.

Under the deal, a list of 22 particularly hazardous chemicals used in scores of herbicides, fungicides and insecticides will gradually be phased out to avoid abrupt withdrawal from the market. The chemicals will be given a further five years' grace if banning them would put crops in serious danger. Pesticide use is to be kept to "a minimum" in parks, playgrounds, schools and near hospitals. Aerial spraying will be banned unless given exceptional approval by safety authorities.

Industry will have to release the results of any studies that show harmful effects, and there is to be better protection for bees, whose numbers have been falling alarmingly across Europe.

The National Farmers' Union said that the measures—which will have to be finally confirmed by the Parliament and EU leaders early in the new year—"will have a devastating effect on the horticultural industry and will see a reduction in crop yield and quality", and would also force up prices.

But environmentalists dismissed this as "scaremongering", pointing out that only a small minority of the 507 substances in pesticides would be banned. Though they would have liked even tougher controls, they still hailed the agreement as a breakthrough. Hiltrud Breyer, the German Green MEP who steered the proposals through the parliament, called them a "milestone for the environment, health and consumer protection". "The EU is setting a global precedent by phasing out highly toxic pesticides," she said.

Yesterday, Nick Mole, of the Pesticides Action Network, said: "This is a landmark, the biggest ever crackdown on poisonous chemicals... It says that anything hazardous to health or the environment will have to go, rather than taking the position... that if it is used properly it can be tolerated."

Source: The Independent/UK, December 23, 2008, ©independent.co.uk. Electronic version accessible at http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/green-living/massive-crackdown-on-the-use-of-scores-of-toxic-pesticides-1206399.html

Beekeeping romance

Love amongst the veils: Brett and Neisha Kindley. *Photo: Daniel Iseli-Otto.*