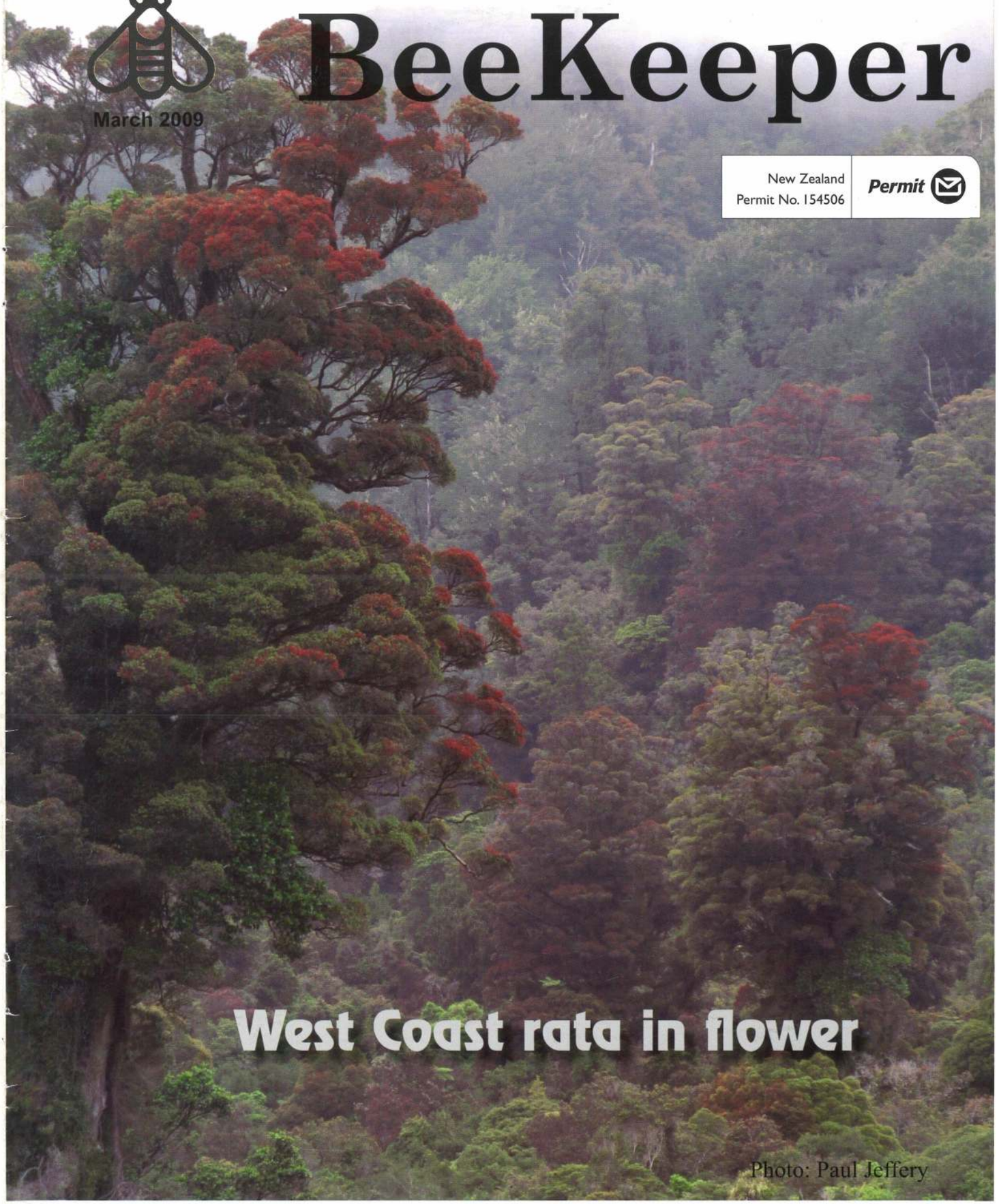
Volume 17 No. 2

The New Zealand BeeKeeper

March 2009



West Coast rata in flower

Photo: Paul Jeffery

ISSN 0110-63325
The Official Journal of The National Beekeepers' Association of New Zealand Inc.

Published by South City Print
P.O. Box 2494
South Dunedin, New Zealand

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Journal subscriptions:
— 11 Issues —
NZ $112.50 GST inc
Australia NZ$125.00
US, UK & Asia NZ$135.00 inc p&p
Subject to review if postage charges increase

NZ Beekeeper Printed & Published by:
South City Print
P.O. Box 2494,
Dunedin 9044.
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Deadline for articles and advertising

May issue: 23 March
June issue: 23 April

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

Meeting with the Minister of Agriculture

On 17 February, Jim and Pam Edwards and I had a 30-minute meeting with the new Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, the Hon David Carter. MAF/ Biosecurity New Zealand staff Paul Bolger and Howard Pharo were also present as advisers to the Minister.

We addressed our concerns regarding the recognition of the importance of bees and beekeepers to the national economy. Jim mentioned the importance of bees in horticulture and the Minister then added, "what about agriculture?"

We also discussed issues relating to biosecurity and eventually the honey imports review process. It was made clear to us that the current Government's position related to free trade was intrinsically the same as that of the previous Labour Government, so we may not see much sympathy in the review process. It should be noted that MAF has the option of rejecting the recommendations from the Review Panel; however, it would not be a good look for the politicians to reject robust scientific advice, especially when it is quite clear that they themselves accept the premise that any barriers to trade based on sanitary grounds must be linked with good science.

I also mentioned that when the last of the South Island varroa control lines were abolished last year, I tried to have the Chatham Islands excluded from the process. At the time the officials were distinctly uninterested. The Minister was somewhat surprised and indicated to his officials that this matter should be dealt with.

I also indicated to the Minister that the real problems with varroa had not yet manifested themselves in New Zealand and explained why. He seemed to understand and appreciate this.

We then thanked the Minister for granting a time extension for the AFB NPMS Review. I discussed the issues relating to enforcement of the NPMS regulations and the tie-in with export verification, especially with products going to the European Union (EU). I also discussed the problem we are having with Biosecurity New Zealand relating to the NPMS; especially the fact that we are getting a lack of response to some matters of advice and the delays regarding prosecution of some ADR defaulters. The Minister appeared somewhat displeased with this state of affairs and I believe we can now make some progress on these matters.

Overall, it was a positive meeting.

Visit to the Minister for Food Safety

On 4 March I will be attending a meeting with the Hon Kate Wilkinson, the Minister for Food Safety, to discuss matters of interest to the NBA. Jim Edwards and others will also be at this meeting.

Executive Council meeting

On the weekend of 20–22 February the Executive Council/AFB NPMS Management Agency held its face-to-face meeting in Christchurch. On the Friday night we held an informal get-together with members of the Canterbury Branch. The branch supplied the nibbles and Stuart Ecroyd assisted with the beverages.

The meeting had a full agenda—66 items—so everyone needed to keep focused to deal with all the issues in a satisfactory manner. This was quite hard, especially as we finished at 6.15 pm after an 8.30 am start.

On the Friday morning before the meeting, some of the Executive Council and the Secretariat visited the NBA Library at Ashburton. Now that we have seen what the library has on the shelves, it has become apparent that a

large assortment of older books is really somewhat outdated. The NBA needs to acquire a substantial quantity of more recent publications to better cater for members' educational needs.

We normally hold Executive Council meetings in Wellington, but the cost of holding our meetings is quite similar regardless of the location, so there is a feeling that future meetings may be held at different venues each time. This will give an opportunity for local members to have a chat with the Executive Council members.

- Frans Laas

Are we and the bees winning?

Have you looked for mites in your hives lately?

Several Hawke's Bay beekeepers have reported very few, if any, mites when hives have been opened. The question then is, "Is this just a seasonal thing, or are our bees developing resistance to the breeding of these little darlings?"

Go and have a look in your hives and see if you are experiencing the same thing.

- Ron Morison

Covering honey supers

It can be a problem when taking off honey that bees are attracted to the honey supers loaded on the truck. Bees will gather around trying to rob the honey. Most have tried covering the load with canvas, blue plastic covers, etc., but Gary Sinkinson was advised to use black plastic builder's foil (the stuff you lay under concrete as a damp-proof layer).

Apparently the bees cannot smell the honey through the plastic and completely leave it alone. The black colour might also have something to do with it.

- Frank Lindsay

Beehive losses in Victoria

[Editor's note: the following account was written on 21 February by Victorian beekeeper Peter McDonald in an email to Frank and Mary-Ann Lindsay. We extend our condolences to all beekeepers who have been affected by the tragic fires in Victoria.]

Here's what we know so far:

84 hives have been completely burnt to a beekeeper in Gippsland. Also in Gippsland, 23 public land bee sites severely burnt, which may take 10–20 years for the plants to recover enough to provide a honey crop.

Hives completely burnt in North East Victoria: two complete loads for one beekeeper (300 hives), 36 hives out of a load of 120 for another beekeeper, two hives out of a load of 100 for a third beekeeper. No information on bee site losses yet.

There are also many smaller beekeepers in some of the fire areas [whose hives] have not been accounted for at this time, so losses will be larger than this.

In addition to all this, there have been many near misses and many hives have suffered smoke and heat damage resulting in bee losses. The excessive heat in the weeks prior to the bushfires also caused some issues with bee losses, and in some cases entire hives being lost as the wax melted and hives were smothered.

But this heat prior to the fires was also a blessing to some of us. Total Fire Ban days prevented the movement of many bees into some of the fire zones for some major honey flows, and may have saved hives from destruction.

On a personal note we lost nothing. The nearest fire was about 30 kilometres away, though we had 400 hives that fire came to within 200 metres of, and another 400 hives that another fire came to within five kilometres of.

- Peter McDonald

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Be careful out there

Recently I had one of those days I'd rather forget except for the lessons learned. I took a new beekeeper out with me for work experience (taking off honey supers). We spent most of the morning driving around looking for passion vine hoppers on tutu. I was quite surprised to find more than a few adults on each bush where two weeks ago there were none: hardly any 'fluffy bums' and no honeydew.

I prefer to put on bee escapes to reduce the bee numbers in the honey supers before blowing the remaining bees out. There are fewer exposed combs and instead of lifting off all the supers to put on the escape boards, I use a couple of "Tweeddale lifters" to split the top honey supers from the brood supers, and insert a bee escape board in one easy action (when there's not much honey).

We were proceeding well, although we did come across a few homemade supers where the handholds did not line up or there were none at all. We had to lift these supers manually off the hives on to drip trays, and placed an escape board on top to allow the bees to escape from the top (bees usually move downwards).

Anyway, we were lifting up some supers when a beautiful frame of brood lifted up as well from the super below. I locked the handle in position and was explaining the brood pattern to my assistant, when suddenly the other handle whipped back into the upright position—it couldn't have been locked down. It glanced across my assistant's eye, hitting him hard enough in the nose to just break the skin. With four supers suddenly dropping down on one side, the hive immediately overbalanced, and as he tried to run to evade the falling hive, the other handle in the down position whacked him behind the knees, knocking him forward onto his face.

I hadn't seen the handle hit him in the face so was concerned that he hadn't been hurt by the knock from behind, while he was concerned that it hadn't damaged his eye as he had felt a little blood. I grabbed the first aid kit and we walked away from the hives and applied a little first aid to his nose, when a friendly bee promptly stung him in the face. Sometimes it doesn't pay to take your veil off to put on a plaster when bees are robbing.

We were lucky. We finished putting escape boards on the apiary and proceeded to remove honey from another apiary where the bees were working a nectar flow. No robbing was happening at this apiary and it was a pleasure to work. We returned to the original apiary a couple of hours later to find most of the bees had left the honey supers. It was just a matter of blowing out the remaining bees and stacking them on the truck, covering each as we went to avoid robbing bees. 'Just a matter?'—the sweat was pouring off of us.

Where there's smoke ...

A little later, in a different part of New Zealand, a queen breeder was having difficulty lighting his smoker on top of a hive when he turned around to see 10-foot-high flames coming from the canopy on the back of his truck.

He managed to untie the straps holding the canopy and push it off the truck deck (tray if you are Australian) and partially put out the fire with drink bottles. A farmer was passing by so he went back and got buckets of water, and they managed to put the fire out completely before it could cause serious damage.

When they looked at the mangled bits of burnt plastic that remained, the queen breeder couldn't find the primed queen cages or the stapler. The saw no longer had a handle, the lopper arms were bent and they couldn't find the container of oil that was there before. All had gone up in flames. I asked the queen breeder what had caused the fire: he believed a small bit of paper from the smoker must have smouldered all morning. Asked why the whole truck hadn't gone up, he replied that the fire was contained to the back of the truck because he had a tonne of sugar behind the cab, which directed the flames away from the cab. The sugar bags were only a bit singed but had they heated up a little more, they would have added to the fire and he perhaps could have lost the vehicle.

Beekeepers: you mainly work alone, so be careful out there—don't become too complacent.

- Frank Lindsay

Letters to the editor

Quintinia, not Kamahi

Dear Editor,

I notice in the February issue of *The New Zealand BeeKeeper* [page 11] that there has been a mix up between Kamahi and Quintinia.

The photograph is of Kamahi but the honey description relates to Quintinia. *[Editor's note: the photograph was of the towai or taiwhero (Weinmannia silvicola), which is related to but often mistaken for the Kamahi.]*

The Kamahi tree or shrub is usually rounded as described, but the leaves usually have a reddish or brownish tinge so show up in the bush. After flowering, the seed heads go quite red and can be confused with rata flowers if seen in the distance.

Kamahi honey is probably one of our best but less appreciated native honeys apart from manuka. In the past, honey packers used to buy Kamahi paying manufacturing prices and then blended a drum of Kamahi with five drums of clover to make the clover taste better. However, they did not pay the clover price.

Kamahi is a very good blending honey. When pure, it can have a distinctive flavour but when blended with other types of honey, the Kamahi flavour disappears and the other honey has its flavour enhanced, as happened when put with clover.

Pure Kamahi honey has a light yellow colour. The pollen is yellow and the bees only bring in small loads when working on Kamahi as they concentrate on the nectar. Kamahi yields better when it is nearly raining and bees seem to work it even when light rain is falling. Bright blue skies seem to slow down nectar production.

Quintinia flowers just before the Kamahi and often the honey from Kamahi and Quintinia are extracted together, which accounts for Kamahi getting the poor reputation as described in the last issue of *The New Zealand BeeKeeper.*

Quintinia has white pollen in contrast to Kamahi. Also, the leaves are longer and the trees grown more upright like a poplar and the flowers are similar to Kamahi in shape but usually lack the pinkish shade of Kamahi. When it is out in the open and large, it spreads out more and has a greyish look to the leaves.

The Quintinia/Kamahi mixture is more typical of Westland honeys. Southland produces a very nice line of Kamahi and has no sign of Quintinia.

Yours,
Gary Jeffery

NBA President replies to December letters

[Editor's note: in the letters to the editor in the February 2009 issue, Gary Jeffery and Mark Horsnell wrote to express their disagreement with aspects of the President's report in the December 2008 issue. Following are Frans Laas' responses to those letters.]

Response to Gary Jeffery

Gary is seriously mistaken when he thinks that I undemocratically disallowed his notice of motion regarding a return to an Apiaries Act. There was no show of hands for the vote to my recollection but it was done by a voice vote, which I determined was in favour of the nays. For that reason I disallowed the motion, as it is my duty to do so.

My conscience definitely hasn't been pricked by this decision and I still stand by it without reservation.

Attempting to create a new Apiaries Act to deal with bees and bee products is a futile endeavour, as current legislation addresses the issues of food safety, product definition, biosecurity, etc. in an adequate manner.

Regards,
Frans Laas
NBA President

Response to Mark Horsnell

While it is possible under the current legislation to declare any organism a pest of local or national importance, the fact that tutu has never been declared a problem that requires some form of legislative control is also of note.

When Polynesians first arrived in New Zealand, you can be fairly certain that some of them were either killed or made very sick when they tried eating the berries. After that the word spread and the problem became manageable. When Europeans arrived the problems began again. I suggest you read Fitchett (1908), obtainable from the Royal Society of New Zealand website.

The last sentence of your letter is not really correct, as New Zealanders have been aware of the problem for over 800 years.

Despite the continuing problems with livestock deaths from eating tutu, there does not appear to have been any significant effort at the moment to declare it a noxious weed by the farming community. This alone would suggest that it is unlikely that it would be declared a pest.

The real solution to the problem is the significant reduction in the passion vine hopper population to stop the production of honeydew. No passion vine hopper, no toxic honey.

While we can argue over many points around tutin poisoning, the fact remains that the NZFSA were duty bound to act as a result of last year's problems. While the process they adopted and the timing of the submission process has justifiably annoyed a lot of beekeepers, the fact remains that we are still in business as beekeepers and have not been shut out of international markets. If the NZFSA had not done anything significant, then foreign countries may have imposed severe restrictions on product for export. The extra layer of bureaucracy that the NZFSA has now to implement wasn't their fault, as they originally had a fairly simple system for beekeepers to use to mitigate tutin contamination of honey.

A final comment: some overseas buyers are insisting on end-point testing of all honey, even of risk-free South Island product.

Regards,
Frans Laas
NBA President

NIWA's climate outlook: February to April 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 wind episodes than normal over the North Island, and lighter winds than normal over the South Island.

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

Rainfall is likely to be normal or above normal in the north of the North Island, normal in other regions of the North Island, and normal or below normal in the South Island. Soil moisture levels and stream flows are likely to be normal in the north and west of the North Island, below normal in the east of the South Island, and normal or below normal elsewhere.

DECA course held in Christchurch

On Saturday 14 February, a DECA (Disease Elimination Conformity Agreement) course was run in Christchurch by Jeff Chandler of the Christchurch Hobbyist Beekeepers Club.

About 30 eager hobbyist and semi-commercial beekeepers attended the course as part of their training for sitting an AFB (American foulbrood) competency test that took place immediately after the course. A successful completion of the American Foulbrood Recognition and Destruction Examination is required in order to meet the requirements of a DECA under the AFB National Pest Management Strategy.

The tutor and some course attendees during one of the presentations.

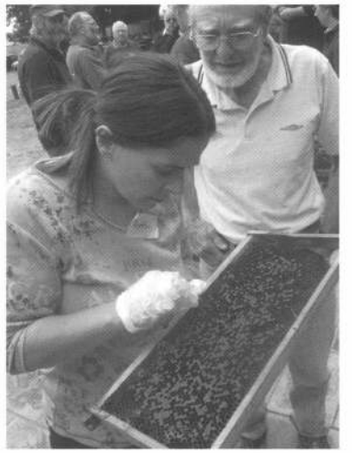
The course covered in detail the extensive material included in the book *Elimination of AFB without the use of drugs.*

I was glad to be present at an excellent course delivery by Jeff. All enquiries in both disease identification and requirements under the AFB Pest Management Strategy legislation were clearly and accurately addressed, which proved his good knowledge on the subject.

Kevin Gates, hives master from the hobbyist club, supported Jeff with useful comments, ensuring that no one missed out a good cup of tea or coffee with some biscuits during the breaks, and later demonstrating how to inspect frames for brood diseases.

At the end of the powerpoint presentations all participants had the chance to be exposed to a frame of a diseased hive with clear symptoms of AFB.

One beekeeper attending the course brought in a dead-out beehive from his apiary in Tuahiwi (North Canterbury) to check if the cause of the death was AFB. After a detailed inspection of every brood frame, it was found that the most likely cause of death was PMS (parasitic mite syndrome), which is the 'new kid on the block', but not AFB. Everyone appreciated this opportunity to inspect the frame as they were exposed to two diseases that sometimes are misdiagnosed. A clear message was given: "Get rid of any AFB problem before varroa arrives".



A course participant practicing the ropiness test under the guidance of tutor Jeff Chandler.

Beekeepers looking at a sticky board with mites from an AFB suspected dead-out hive.

To sum up, a good balance of science and practical experience made this course most useful and enjoyable and I am looking forward to the next one!

I would like to thank Jeff Chandler and Kevin Gates for offering me the opportunity to attend this course as an observer.

I would encourage every beekeeper—not just people aiming to sit an AFB recognition test—to attend this type of course. Over time we tend to adopt bad habits and attending this course can be a useful tool to make a reality check on our beekeeping practices against our legal obligations.

If courses like this one are run more often throughout the country, I am sure that the beekeeping industry would not be far from achieving the eradication of American foulbrood from New Zealand.

- Marco Gonzalez
Apiculture Officer
AsureQuality Limited

All photos provided by Marco Gonzalez.

Manawatu hobbyists field day

Field day participants.

On Sunday 7 February, the Manawatu Beekeepers Club held a field day at Gary Sinkinson's property at Colyton, Feilding, with over 40 beekeepers attending.

After a cup of tea, the group went to inspect and remove the honey from five hives. The hives had been moved in from Bulls and were full, with the queens being "honeyed down" into the five middle frames of the lower brood super. Gary, Neil Farrer and Gavin Lambert inspected the hives (passing around the frames to the group) and demonstrated the removal of honey from the hives using a 230-volt electric blower. Despite the hives being pulled apart and the bees being blown from the frames, the bees took hardly any notice of us. The new beekeepers had an opportunity to examine frames of brood and to see a queen bee: the queens were from a Nelson queen breeder.

Morning tea.

We then adjourned to the shed where Neil showed some branches from a tutu bush, gave a talk on what to look for and what we "all" should be doing to make sure we are producing a safe product.

Anne Hume then demonstrated the uncapping and extraction of honey in a two-frame hand-driven extractor.

After lunch, Gary fired up the plant and started extracting manuka frames. He explained that he had only been beekeeping for five years and now runs 800 hives, all on manuka. He has secure sites as he owns the 450-acre farm where most of his hives are located. He also mentioned that despite there being other commercial beekeepers' hives around his farm, he hadn't noticed any drop in production.

We were extremely impressed with his set up. Gary is a clever individual and has built most of the plant himself from the ground up. He spent a day getting all the floor levels right so that everything drained into a corner sump, and he had reconditioned old extracting equipment rather than splash out on new gear. He believed that most of the old gear worked well but needed new electronic controls, and there were electronic controls everywhere: two electricians had spent 13 days wiring the place. Gary also had built the stainless steel racking, the auger and the heat exchange, reconditioned the uncapper, the 24-frame semi-radial extractor and spin float, plus he had the pricker converted to an air operated system. Steel surfaces that couldn't be

Gavin Lambert and Gary Sinkinson checking honey frames: these are new plastic frames drawn out this season.

replaced had either been powder coated or re-plated. The drum scales had a control to shut off the pump when the correct weight was reached: therefore no overflows occurred when he was called away to the phone.

Gary said he had set up his new plant similar to Tweeddale's operation in Taihape, as he knew their plant worked. He has experienced a few teething problems; for example, the honey wasn't flowing out of the extractor quickly enough, but this could be fixed by adding another pump. Also, it appears he could double the extraction cycle to get out every bit of manuka. Everything is up off the floor on adjustable legs, making the whole room easy to clean with a water blaster.

In his beekeeping, Gary doesn't do any heavy physical lifting. He has rebuilt an Ezyloader to fit his truck and has a 230-volt winch motor working via an inverter off the truck's battery. The hot room was large enough to operate a forklift and the honey was then barrowed into the extracting room onto a lifter. Gary was still trying to work out an easy way to get the empty supers to the extractor end of the room without barrowing them.

I was particularly impressed with his electronic refractometer. Just turn it on, wait for the temperature reading and press a button, and up pops the moisture reading.

All in all, a very good day.

- Frank Lindsay

The old and the new: Merv Farrington and Stu Ferguson.

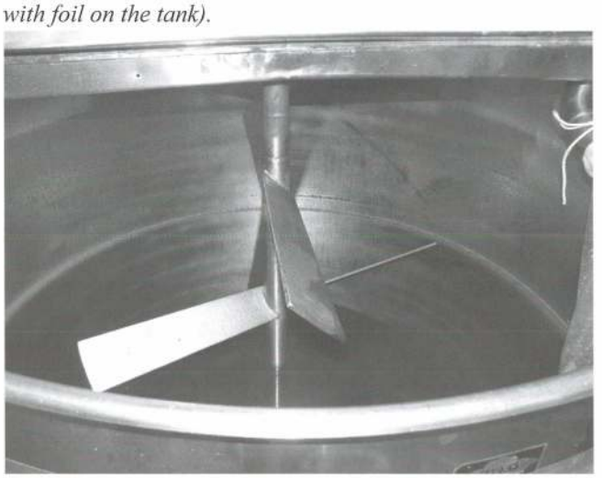
Photos: Frank and Mary-Ann Lindsay.

The floor is sealed with "easy flow" which is used in most freezing works as it is hard wearing.

Gary made the auger (under the uncapper), the stands and racking. The pricker is a manual model that has been converted to operate on compressed air. (The control box is in the centre.)

The honey from the extractor is combined with the cappings and pumped from the auger through the heat exchange (partly obscured) along the ceiling down into the spin float (right hand side). The honey is then pumped into the settling tank, which contains stirring paddles to homogenise the manuka honey.

Spin float and storage tank (note the heat ribbon covered with foil on the tank).



Inside the tank:stirring paddles.

From the colonies

Auckland Branch

A date for your diaries

Auckland Branch Field Day
May 16, 2009
Venue: Cammells Honey, Clevedon
Overseas and NZ speakers being invited
Field honey removal demonstration
All beekeepers welcome
Full programme will be in the April issue.

Bay of Plenty Branch

The crop? What's happened over the summer? As extraction gets underway it seems there is a mixture of outcomes from poor, OK to good. Flows have tended to be shorter than other years and weather has been variable. Coastal areas have been more marginal than the inland areas, and the rush to remove honey early to avoid testing for tutin may also have contributed to a lower crop for some people. I do not disagree with the need to produce safe honey but I look forward to the review of the regulations, and hope some changes are made to recognise the lower risk that commercially extracted honey poses.

It was good to read in the February journal that a large number of submissions had been made regarding tutin. It is an unfortunate fact of our beekeeping life that to have your say you must put in a submission in the hope some notice is taken of your opinion. Hopefully people remembered the NPMS submissions that were due at the end of January and managed to find time to put their thoughts together. I was pleased about the extension of time for the NPMS submission but still found it difficult to find sufficient quality time. I am not sure office-bound people realise that for some of us self-employed people, the only time available to construct submissions is in the evenings. So extension of time or not, it is still a rush. Good on all of you who have found time over the past few months to write submissions on the various issues facing our industry. Painful as it can be to find the energy and time, I believe it essential but then maybe I just like to have my say.

Conference update

Conference planning is now well underway. You will find more information in the April issue of this journal, along with an invitation to this year's conference and an accommodation booking form. Look forward to seeing you on 7–10 June, Millennium Hotel, Rotorua.

- Barbara Pimm, Branch Secretary

Hawke's Bay Branch

Despite predictions little or no rain has fallen and Hawke's Bay is now very dry. It's pretty typical when you finally get to February and the weather is perfect there is nothing left for the bees to do. Some areas of Hawke's Bay have done very poorly this year, while others are average or above-average.

Varroa is starting to show up now but probably in lower numbers than in previous years. It has been unbelievably hot in the last week with Hastings recording the highest temperature ever: it sure makes it interesting working bees. You really have to take your time and drink plenty of water.

I hope you have all had fun searching the 28 square kilometres around each of your apiary sites. Personally I have found scrambling down cliff faces on the edge of rivers looking for tutu bushes most invigorating; still it is going well and I should have the entire area covered by 3010 ☺.

- John Berry, Branch President

Southern North Island Branch

Another date for your diaries

AGM: Monday, 30 March
Conference Room
AsureQuality, Batchelor Centre
Palmerston North

Nelson Branch

The first reports of the honey harvest are starting to come in, with most agreeing that they have a below-average to good volume of honey, but of poorer monofloral quality than last year. The summer has been very hot and finally dry, but earlier rains have kept clover and other ground covers producing nectar later than usual. In early February, the landscape is now burned off and is looking very tinder dry.

In Nelson, beekeepers have reported that where there has been clover (i.e. 88 Valley, Sherry River, Waimea Plains), the honey flow has been good, up to five boxes of honey in some cases. But the manuka and kanuka have not flowered well this year in most of the top of the South Island, including the Marlborough Sounds. The honey produced is of a low pollen count, except in the higher region where the flowering has coincided with good weather.

Marlborough has produced some good borage harvests this year. In Golden Bay the honey has been a 'mixed bag' with some sites yielding an average crop and others virtually nothing. The west side has produced a good northern rata flow and some white rata has been seen flowering also.

It looks like it will be an excellent honeydew season with good flows already coming in near sea level and low land areas. For beekeepers to make the most of the honeydew situation they need to have empty boxes as close to the brood nest as possible.

Beekeepers are starting to organise their first tutin declarations, the new NZFSA forms finally being available on 25 January.

- Merle Moffitt

Canterbury Branch

The 2008–09 season is about over and it looks to be a little below average (again). This past week brought a little rain, which was a welcome relief: one, it reduced the temperature and two, it helped eliminate the critical fire risk that most of Canterbury was under.

Continuing warm days with no wind makes it a real pleasure to get the season's crop in and do autumn requeening.

We here in Canterbury are waiting for the inevitable spread of varroa; anecdotally it doesn't appear to have spread as far as we first feared but continual surveillance is obviously required.

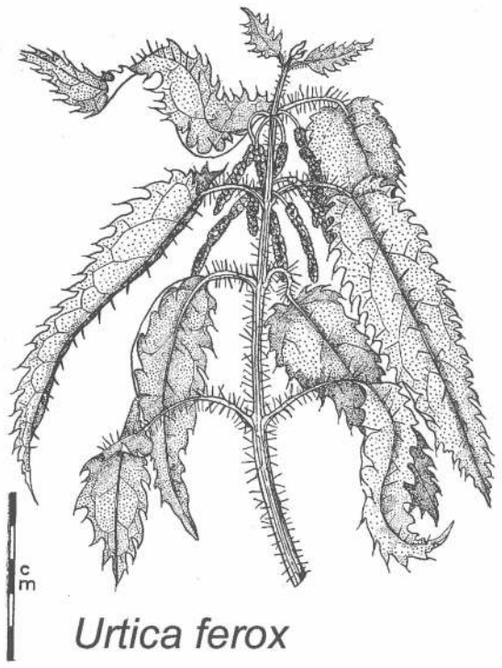
Now varroa is a reality in Canterbury and most people will be treating hives this coming spring—this winter will be an opportune time to do some serious soul searching. There is little point in pouring your last five years' profits back into your business if it can't function as a going concern. Easy to say, but it is wise to quit while still in the black.

- Brian Lancaster

Trees and Shrubs of New Zealand

Urtica ferox

Maori name: Ongaonga
Common name: Tree nettle



Urtica ferox

The Ongaonga is a tall shrub with woody stems and variable, coarsely serrated leaves 8–15 centimetres long with rigid stinging hairs (the stinging sensation from the Ongaonga can last 3 to 4 days).

The small greenish-white flowers in racemes bloom from December to March, yielding a pale nectar. The nectar has a cloudy appearance but granulates extra light amber, with a flavour similar to thistle.

The Maori treat the stings from the nettle by bruising the leaves of the Kawakawa or the common Dock and applying this to the affected area. It has been said the leaves of the nettle contain a chemical, lecithin, which is an antidote for the nettle's own sting.

Nettle and Kawakawa bark were boiled and used for eczema and venereal disease.

- Tony Lorimer

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- it's very safe to use (very important - especially for staff)
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- very gentle on queen bees & nucs
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9600 plus strips	$1.43 + GST each

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About the Apiary

It's March and suddenly autumn appears to be a lot closer. It's getting cooler at night and we are now starting to have heavy dews in the morning. The nice part is that it's still very hot during the day so the bees are flying well, bringing in a little autumn nectar to pack around the brood nest.

In most of my areas now, the flow is basically over although the recent heavy rains have stimulated grass growth. It is greener the further north you travel out of Wellington. Only the pennyroyal and koromiko (hebe) are flowering. Gorse is producing pollen again but only in the drier areas, but there are paddocks of clover up north where 100 millimetres of rain have fallen already during February.

Inspecting the hives

You can see what's going on immediately as you go into an apiary. Lots of flight activity indicates the bees are working a source of nectar somewhere. The bees will be fanning at the entrance and there aren't many guard bees out patrolling the landing board. On hot days you may see bees hanging down in a little beard from the landing board or up the front of a hive.

Where there isn't a source of nectar, flight activity is reduced considerably. You will see as many as 20 bees guarding a small entrance, challenging every bee that comes into the hive, as well as any robber bees from another colony that think they will give it a try. Robber bees and wasps fly in a nervous, jerky manner across the entrance, looking for an unguarded area. For those beekeepers that leave their entrances wide open during the summer, it's time the entrance restrictors went on. This makes it easier for the bees to guard the entrance and also restricts access to night visitors such as mice and wax moth.

Take a few minutes to observe what's going on with each hive when you first enter the apiary. As well as bees bringing in pollen on their legs, you will also see the odd bee coming in with a small load of propolis on their pollen baskets, and bees will be sealing up cracks between supers from the inside and outside of the hive. You may also still see the odd wax moth waiting on an upper super, well away from the entrance.

In front of the hive where bees first cast any of their brothers' and sisters' bodies that died in the hive, wasps will be seen looking for fresh 'meat'.

A more sinister process is going on within the hive. Varroa mites have had a free rein since your last treatment and are now building in numbers. I observed a drone starting to emerge and carefully picked it out to find it had five mites running around on its thorax. This drone looked fully formed but inside it won't have developed fully, so will have only a short life. Looking across a frame of capped brood, I spied a stunted worker bee with deformed wings. Outside the hive I could see four young-looking bees, crawling but also trying to fly, across the ground away from the hive—some call this "crawling death". All are early signs that this hive is in trouble and needs immediate attention with a registered treatment.

Not all hives in an apiary have the same varroa 'loading'. Some will only have a few thousand mites—the threshold level when hives should be treated. Others are well past that level and are showing the first signs of distress. The positive side is that because beekeepers are alternating their treatments, commercial products are still working so hives recover quickly.

It's also interesting, when checking brood frames for AFB while taking off the honey crop, to note the condition of the queens. One we found had half-worker, half-raised drone cappings in the worker cells, plus a few queen cells hanging off the bottom of the frame. This is a sign that this queen had just about run out of sperm in her spermatheca and that the bees were trying to replace her. I will introduce a nuc to the hive on my next visit so that I know I have a good queen heading that colony.

A few other hives had spotty brood, indicating that these queens were also failing after a couple of years of solid work. At first glance she needed replacing, but then when I looked at the brood that was three days old: it was all the same age even though it was in a spotty brood pattern. In another brood frame, the brood was wall to wall with beautiful brood, with hardly a missed cell. This hive had a new superseded queen so I marked it with a spot of water-based pen paint. As an explanation, in the middle frames I was looking at the brood pattern from the old queen—which was spotty—and because these cells emerged at different times, that pattern was continued to the next generation. But in an outside frame where there hadn't been brood before, the brood pattern was perfect. It just goes to show that first indications when you inspect only a few frames might not be telling you the full story.

I only found a couple of hives that needed new queens in an apiary of 12 hives. Normally at this time of the year, I would be putting protected queen cells into all hives, no matter what the condition of the queens, so that all will be headed by a new queen this coming spring. I have done this for the last couple of years but this autumn I'm evaluating my stock again, looking for good producers from which I can either select for queen-breeding stock or as drone producers. I wanted to see if any of my own queen stock that I had previously selected for supersedure had survived, as quite often these hives have a mother and daughter in them at the same time (both laying), and often out-produce a normal hive.

So that's what I'm going to be doing during March: pulling honey, checking hives, putting in strips and fogging hives, checking tutu bushes for passion vine hoppers and extracting honey.

Preparing for winter

I generally like to leave my hives three full-depth supers high for winter, with one and a half supers of honey and a hive full of bees. Why? Because we have early crops which are all over by Christmas unless we get lots of rain. So I start the bees off in the spring strong, and split most of the hives in half to stop swarming. This method doesn't always work as some seem determined to swarm and unless more brood is taken from them, they will swarm. (Just before the flow, I unite the hives into strong colonies.)

Commercial beekeepers prefer to winter in singles (with six frames of honey) or in two supers (with a full super of honey), and manage them with early feeding. Those with singles will build to a producing colony by December when their main flow starts, so this works for them. Each area and region is different and beekeepers must learn how to manage their colonies so they build into strong hives, ready for their main flow without swarming. This is the goal of all beekeepers. Unfortunately it takes three to five years to learn as every season is different and it takes a while to learn the flowering patterns in your area.

When you first start off you should be recording in a notebook what's flowering and when and the condition within your hives, remembering all the time that when you are looking at a frame of brood, the cause (stimulation) for this happened a month ago.

So that's it for this month. Remember that everything you do in the next couple of months sets up your hives for the next season.

Things to do this month

AFB check: check hives before removing any honey, and especially after the robbing season has finished. Extract honey. Requeen. Stack supers in a cool, airy environment to discourage wax moth. (One commercial beekeeper told me he stacked them in a refrigerated container and put in a large box of dry ice which kept the container at four degrees Celsius for months: long enough to stop wax moth developing.)

Control mites: some individual hives are showing high mite numbers. Treat everything in an area, and try to coordinate your treatments with all the other beekeepers in your area so all hives are treated at the same time. Winter down hives. Put entrance closures on hives. Check for wasps. (I lost quite a few hives to wasps last autumn, but this year there doesn't seem as many so be on guard.)

- Frank Lindsay

Hungarian beekeepers and their experiences with Feedbee

[Editor's note: this article (in Hungarian) was originally published in the Hungarian bee journal Meheszet *on July 15, 2008. The translated version of the article was sent to Neil Farrer by Dr Abdi Saffari, a specialist in animal and honey bee nutrition who toured New Zealand in 2007 to promote Feedbee.]*

In the beginning of this year Feedbee, a pollen substitute diet, has been introduced in Hungary as one of the first countries in Europe. Playing this pioneer role, the feedback about Feedbee using Hungarian beekeepers was eagerly awaited. During the month of June many customers were keen about their experiences and remarks concerning the Feedbee product.

In the course of this survey we were happy to notice that the beekeepers were definitely positively satisfied with the results of Feedbee in a range of more than 90%. We would like to highlight some of their experiences in general:

- The bee colonies had reached very good results regarding development and honey production.
- The bees are strong, healthy, and have higher resistance.
- During the spring feeding the general feed intake was 1 kg per colony.
- The three methods of feeding (powder, patty or liquid) turned out to be all effective.
- When feeding through patties, the addition of icing sugar resulted in a vigorous consumption. Without icing sugar the patties being prepared with Feedbee and sugar syrup were not adequately sweet, and they were consumed a bit slower. But even in this case good results were achieved, as proved by the evaluation reports.
- The fast development is good for those that would like to see an intensive growth of the bee colonies or would like to make extra colonies in their apiaries. For those who don't have such plans the only "problem" seems to be the possibility of swarming. Of course the intensity of development can be manipulated when the prepared feed contains less Feedbee, and through the chosen time of feeding. Experiments on these will start next spring.

The evaluation of three beekeepers will be discussed as follows.

More honey

On the 17th of February 2008 I used Feedbee for 30 colonies in the form of a patty as an experiment. The remaining 120 colonies were used to compare the results. I made Feedbee patties of half a kilo each according to the producer's advice. During the whole spring the Feedbee colonies were not fed with any other sugar syrups than with half a kilo healing patty and half a kilo Feedbee patty.

In the beginning it was a bit difficult for the bees to carry the patty, but after a whole month they had consumed it all. The colonies fed with Feedbee became very strong and by the

end of March we already had to make room for the honey in the hives. By this time most of the experimental colonies had reached a population extent of 7–8 frames in the honey super and 9–10 frames in the brood chamber. These colonies already started to prepare to swarm around the 10th of April, which is why we had to put empty honeycombs before the rapeseed plants bloomed, in order to make the bees busy and to prevent swarming.

Out of the 30 colonies 25 had to be split up until the rape blooming was over. The new colonies have already brought 10–15 kg of acacia honey. The five remaining colonies, which were much weaker in the spring and that had not been split up, were completely developed for acacia flowers. In one to two days' time the bee colonies had built up to three to four combs and the colony immediately laid eggs in full. For example, in the hives that I took five frames covered with new population and replaced them with five empty combs, the colony laid eggs on the entire combs during the next three days. We could not notice any weaknesses in the split colonies, because their development and their handling of the new bees were so rhythmic and rapid.

In the colonies fed with Feedbee, the average honey production for *spring honey* (fruits and grass) was 10 kg, *rape* 30 kg, and acacia 35 kg (one *acacia*, without counting the production of the new colonies), *summer honey* (sunflower) 12 kg. These quantities indicate the weight of the honey after rotation. The colonies that were not fed with Feedbee did not provide any honey that could be taken away before the blooming of the rape and after the blooming of the acacia. The average honey production was 18 kg of rape honey and 30 kg of acacia honey. (I did not shift the hives.)

The bee colonies fed with Feedbee are calmer; they leave earlier and collect more nectar and pollen than the non-fed colonies (standard). The capped brood and population were larger than the non-fed colonies. During the day the colony laid more actively than the colonies in the non-fed colonies. Young queens started laying eggs earlier in the brood chamber.

We noticed that the workers are rounder and bigger. After the acacia period we did not notice any population decline. The Feedbee colonies remained more populated than the average colonies. There is another positive remark to make: I did not notice any mites, not even before the acacia period during the drone propagation inspection. During fumigation only a few mites could be noticed.

My advice to those who would like to use Feedbee. It is useful to put another empty beehive with foundation combs next to every single hive, in order to hinder swarming. I can only advise Feedbee to my colleagues! (*Kámán Levente, Alsópahok*)

More bees

In February I was offered a chance to order Feedbee food. I was sceptical, but willing to try it. I wanted to know to what extent it could do more or less than my pollen substitute. I have to admit that it can do more; much more. This substance has been developed well by researchers. On what do I base my statement? Because I wanted to try out the Feedbee product I only used it for some colonies without winnowing (15 colonies). At the time of patty feeding (the 22nd of February) these bee colonies showed an average state of development, were not ill and were provided with a sufficient honey stock. The standard 70 colonies were provided with the same facilities and were located in the same area.

I prepared three kinds of Feedbee patties for my bees: 1. according to the producer, a patty that had been kneaded with Feedbee sugar into something hard; 2. a patty kneaded with Feedbee icing sugar and sugar syrup; 3. a patty prepared with Feedbee icing sugar and sugar syrup and the pollen substitute that I had been using up to now. For all three kinds of patty I used the same proportions when adding the sugar syrup to the basic product (1:1).

The standard colonies received the same pollen substitute and sugar patties prepared with honey that I had been using for years and was satisfied with.

The first checks pointed only at a decrease in patties. The bees started only slowly to eat the pure Feedbee patties, carried them heavily, while the other types of patties were consumed well. Probably because of its consistency, as they were a little softer. I thought that the bees did not like these patties, but after a while the consumption increased. I compensated the consumed patties where necessary. Bringing pollen from outside only enhanced the consumption.

At the end of March I got the chance to examine my bees extensively. By that time it was already clear that the bees fed with Feedbee were living a more active life. When the propagation of the Feedbee colonies was examined we noticed that the largest population had been reached in those colonies that had been eating more Feedbee (pure Feedbee patties).

For me the biggest surprise was the fact that even the strongest colonies of the standard colonies were underdeveloped compared with a Feedbee colony. In some cases we were able to measure the population increase by the number of frames. In case of the same number of frames with bees the standard colonies were behind by 15–20% within the covered brood range compared with Feedbee colonies. At the time of comparison the Feedbee colonies were in a much more developed state than the standard colonies. They kept increasing their population under control until the time the hives were split with the exception of one colony because of a possible swarming. It is a fact that those colonies achieved much more than the standard colonies and that was also shown in the rape honey quantity during its extraction.

For me this difference is already convincing enough. Learning from the experiments I would like to use this substance for my bee colonies to stimulate them at the end of the winter and in spring by all means in the future. (*Kiss János, Kalocsa*)

Fewer illnesses

At the end of February I gave Feedbee to my bees in the form of a flat sugar patty and mixed it with icing sugar. Every colony received 1 kg. Despite the fact that I did not

make comparisons (there were no bee colonies to check the results), my opinion about Feedbee is very positive. My bees are stronger and develop faster compared to previous years. Regarding the rape they were strong, maybe even too strong. The prevention of the swarming took a lot of time and was only partly a success. Because I am not a shifting beekeeper I know that my yearly honey production depends on the local natural pollen and nectar and the weather plays an important role. Considering these circumstances it is important how I deal with my bees.

The rape provided a good honey production: 23 kg per colony. The acacia honey did not turn out as we planned because of natural factors. When the acacia started blooming the rape was still in bloom for another two days and the bees rather visited this plant. Three beautiful days followed but we could feel the hot weather would be on its way. This heatwave took away the acacia and that is why we had a result of only 18 kg acacia honey after feeding. It is important to know that my bees live in a region where the acacia tree groups are scattered around and are not close to one another.

As I am a bee queen breeder, I have to send in bee samples for nosema and mites testing every year (*the author lives in Slovakia.* Meheszet *Ed.*). The results were better compared to previous years but the most important thing was the fact that there was not one colony showing any serious infection.

A few prepared Feedbee patties in little bags remained from the end of February and I did not store them in a freezer. At the end of June I put these patties into the mating hives next to the traditionally prepared sugar patties (not kneaded together). I noticed that the traditional patties were more wanted. That was my mistake, because I should have realised beforehand that Feedbee food is rich in proteins that can start to spoil after a while. But it is surprising that this only happened after a period of four months. I had heard that patties made out of smaller amounts of other protein diets such as soy flour or milk powder usually start to get spoiled after one or two months.

At this moment in June my bees are in good health. This first year it seems that our invested money will return with a certain rate of interest. By all means I will try out Feedbee for feeding my bees in the autumn as well. (*Kiss Sándor, Ipolyság*).

- Piffkó László

Hives in the Coromandel

Above: While beekeepers in other regions are still removing honey for processing, these hives near Colville on the Coromandel Peninsula have been set up for queen rearing, the honey crop long since gone.

Right: If you are looking to see how high the supers are stacked, there is not much to see on the Coromandel if you take a late summer break. This photo was taken in early February 2009, and shows the vigilance of beekeepers having removed all honey supers before the bees have had a chance to think about honeydew.

Bottom right: Some people have a deer hut, others one for whitebaiting: this beauty is for grafting. Even the step is a super.

Photos: O'Bee Photography.