Beekeepers Association of the ACT
PO Box 1482, Woden, ACT, 2606

Newsletter of the Beekeepers Association of the ACT Incorporated
Website: www.actbeekeepers.asn.au

Meetings of the Beekeepers Association of the ACT Inc are held on the second Thursday of the month at 7.30 pm at the CIT, Heysen Street, Weston in Building A
Contact: Association President – Angela O'Neil Ph: 02 62625220
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June 2009

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on 11 June. The guest speaker will be our President Angela O'Neil who will speak on 'Beekeeping and the Law'.

As usual the Thursday meeting will commence at 7.30 pm with Beeginners' Corner. Supper will be available following the guest speaker's presentation.

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President's report

Hello members. This month has been a quiet month for the Committee, after the excitement of summer, bees and the AGM. We're definitely moving into winter now, and the activity of the bees has diminished considerably.

Having said that, I thought I'd mention that when I was in Wagga recently on a reasonably warm morning, standing outside the Star Cinema in the RAAF Base, I noticed that there was a lot of insect activity in and around a tree very near by. It was a conifer tree – a fairly common ornamental conifer.

It didn't take long to realise that the insects were bees, so I went over to have a look, expecting there to be a hive 'inside' the tree, but that proved to be wrong. So, I started paying a bit more attention to what they were doing. Their high level of activity, which involved flying around the tree as though inspecting it, alighting on the foliage for awhile and then flying off very determinedly towards the roof of the cinema and disappearing into an unused chimney certainly spoke of foraging. However, there were no flowers, or anything approximating a nectar or pollen source to trigger the bees' foraging activity. I suspected the hive was located in the chimney and was really

intrigued. My colleague was also interested, but probably more concerned that the bees had set up house in the local cinema.

I did some research, when I got home. The research suggests that the bees were out collecting resin to make propolis. This would make sense, as winter was fast approaching, and no doubt the hive had nooks and crannies to be filled. That's the first time I've seen such a large and purposeful group of bees out collecting resin. We came back to the cinema in the afternoon to see what the bees were up to - they had moved onto the next conifer along the path, and were exploiting that one in just as systematic a manner. The close-up photo shows two bees gathering resin – one deep in the foliage at the top right, and one very obviously in the foreground at the bottom.

Winter swarming

The place: Weston Park
The time: Sunday 14 June at 1p.m. onwards.

Members and friends are invited to gather in swarm numbers for social intercourse at a barbecue. BYO.

On a social note, we're having a Winter Swarming in the middle of June this year – a BBQ at Weston Park. It's an opportunity to get together and catch up, and maybe have a game of beach cricket! Cross our fingers for a good day. Watch out for the notice in this newsletter.

I'll be heading off to China for most of July, and will bring back any reports I can of honey and beekeepers in China.

Cheers *Angie*

RIRDC field day Wednesday 8 July 2009 9.30am to 4.40 pm

At University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury Campus. Enter through College Drive off Bourke St Richmond.

Admission FREE

Some of the items on the program: Colony Collapse Disorder; Demonstration of stingless bees and native bees; Nosema ceranae; anti-varroa boards; premier of film 'Honeybee Blues'; small hive beetle; implications of varroa in PNG; and more**.**
Presenters from CSIRO (Denis Anderson), UWS, NSW DPI, UNSW,QLD DPI

Sick of bottling honey?

At the 2007 Royal Canberra Show, Cec Mercer was selling some jars of honey comb like the one pictured so I thought I would give it a try.

First I made up a board with 24 holes drilled in it to fit the screw thread of a standard jar of honey. Not having tried it before I placed it on top of a strong hive in September thinking that the bees would be most keen to build up their stores of honey after winter.

I used a queen excluder and it was on top of two 8 frame brood boxes. I didn't use foundation because I thought it is not so nice to eat.

At first the bees seemed uninterested so I removed the queen excluder to encourage them. They started to build comb in the jars and they had about half of the jars filled with comb and some honey when they swarmed and took the honey with them.

I left the jars on the hive but the wax soon began to get mouldy in the damp spring weather so I removed them and started again. This time I used a newly hived strong colony which was ready for supering and it was late November. I put the jars directly on top of a single brood box with no queen excluder. I figured the jars would not be attractive for brood comb since the temperature would be harder to regulate.

The bees started building comb almost immediately and within one month the jars were chockers. I removed the jars and placed them aside so the bees inside could escape. After about an hour when they were free of bees, I took them inside and removed the top centimetre of comb with a spoon and filled the bee space between the jar and the comb with fresh liquid honey. The result was a real treat and they made wonderful Christmas presents. You really can't beat fresh honey comb for flavour but some of my family thought the jars looked too nice to eat and have kept them for showing to friends.

Stephen Thearle

Big cities sprout rooftop apiaries

It's happening at the Queen's grocers Fortnum & Mason, the famous Piccadilly food emporium. But it started some years back in 2005, when some hives of Carniolan bees - noted for their sweet nature - were first housed in Shropshire. They produced the first batch of Fortnum's Bees' Honey in 2006. Now installed in their new residences on the roof of 181 Piccadilly, they fly high above Mayfair, visiting the grounds, gardens and squares of the best addresses in London, including the 42-acre private garden of Buckingham Palace, gathering rather superior nectar. The first batch of Fortnum's rooftop honey was unusually fine, thanks to the wide variety of flora in the immediate vicinity, and the pollen from numerous chestnut and lime trees.

Fortnum's beekeeper Steve Benbow, 39, is one of several hundred urban apiarists in the British capital. He maintains that city honey is purer than country honey, being unaffected by agricultural chemicals, while traffic pollution doesn't seem to affect bees. The city environment is also warmer and honey yields are considerably enhanced.

In France keeping city bees safely is taught in a school in central Paris next to an apiary established in the Luxembourg Gardens in 1856. This is probably one reason why beekeeping in Paris is thriving, with colonies living on private balconies, at an inner-city nunnery and, on top of the Opéra Bastille and the Palais Garnier.

Urban beekeeping is illegal in Manhattan, where honeybees fall under an ordinance that forbids keeping animals that are "wild, ferocious, fierce, dangerous or naturally inclined to do harm." The solution is to put hives up high, where they will be undetected and give the bees easy access to rooftop gardens.

Roof top city honey is of good quality and sells at a premium.

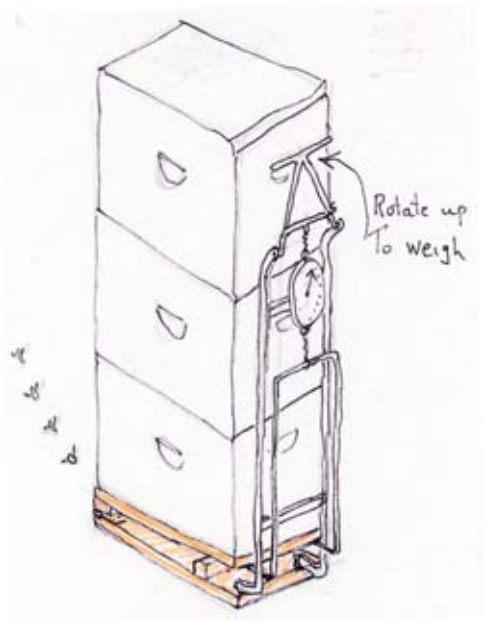
Sources: Time article by Marion Hume dated 21/11/07

http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1686827,00.html http://www.fortnumandmason.com/Fortnums-Bees/Home.aspx

Thanks to news-scout Sheila Gall

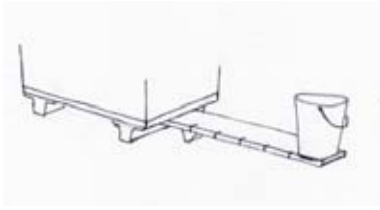
How to weigh a beehive

Dick Johnson advises us to keep a check on hive weight during the winter as a way of monitoring the stores available to the bees and thus avoid starvation.
The quick way is to lift the back of the hive and rely on experience and memory to estimate the weight. Beekeepers with poor memories and bad backs will be looking for possible alternatives and just one such alternative appeared on the ABC's Inventors show on Wednesday May 20.



In the sketch, which has been drawn with apologies to the inventor Andrew Janiak, the coloured part is very much like a pallet, but with a hinge. Instead of a load of bricks on the pallet you put a beehive. There is one pallet per hive, left permanently in position. The cost of these is said to be just a few dollars each.

Instead of a forklift there is a forked gadget that prises the two parts of the pallet apart when you push up on a handle. The weight is registered on a spring balance, but for the version sketched, this weight has to be multiplied by two to get the full weight of the hive.



An alternative method, a bit more rough and ready, is to use a plank with a fulcrum nailed to it and a brick or bucket of water for balancing the weight of the back of the hive.

Thieves move on UK hives

The latest news from the UK indicates that 80 per cent of the honey consumed is imported. Home-produced honey has been less than usual probably because of two recent very wet summers which caused 30% over-winter hive losses as against the usual 10%. As a result, in some areas honey is in short supply and quite valuable. And so are the honeybees. In fact their value has increased to the point where they are a profitable target for thieves. A bee farmer in Shropshire has lost 100 hives, while in Hampshire alone, at least four farms have been hit in the past month.

Thefts have been reported in Selborne, north of Petersfield, Basingstoke and the New Forest. In the most recent incident, six hives worth an estimated £1,800 on the black market were stolen from a commercial farm at Micheldever, north of Winchester. The victim, John Cosburn, president of the Hampshire Beekeepers Association, said: "It has got to be someone who knows about bees"

The British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA) said it was "very sad" to think that the people behind the thefts might be beekeepers themselves.

In Staffordshire, thieves sneaked into a honey farm and stole 18 hives worth £5,000, which were among 600 that Richard Lindsey, of the Great Little Honey Company, has dotted in fields round the countryside.

Source: article in "The Independent" dated 22/05/09 By Michael McCarthy, Environment Editor

Thanks to news-scout Phil Burch

June reminders

If our hives are in a sunny protected position with plenty of honey stores, the bees will require little attention during June.

If they are on a farming property, an external check to ensure no vandal or cattle damage should suffice. Cattle are inquisitive and tend to knock hives over. Should you be unlucky enough to find a situation like this, put the components and bees back together in the best way possible. If cattle share the bee yard, to avoid a situation like this, hives should be placed together in twos and close enough so, if knocked, they will fall against each other thus avoiding major damage.

Any spare time can be spent building and reconditioning equipment. Make sure you have adequate bottoms, boxes, lids and frames to cater for all those swarms that will emerge when we least expect them in Spring.

Dick Johnston

The oldest written law about bees

You may be surprised to know that the oldest written laws about bees are found in the Hittite Laws. Who are the Hittites, you ask?

The Hittites were an ancient people who established a kingdom in Anatolia - the area now known as Turkey: bounded by the Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea and the Aegean Sea – around 1800 BC (or BCE if you prefer). In the map shown, the Hittite Empire is in red circa 1300 BCE, at the height of the Hittite Empire. The Egyptian kingdom is shown in green.

The Hittites (or *the Hatti* as they called themselves) were very effective legislators. Wikipedia tells us that they probably established the first constitutional monarchy! So it is no surprise that the earliest written laws about bees are found in the Hittite Laws. The laws are dated circa 1300 BCE, around the same time as the map.

The written laws were cuneiform documents: that is they were written on clay tablets, by means of a blunt reed for a stylus. The impressions left by the stylus were wedge shaped. '*Cuneus'* is Latin for 'wedge', hence the name 'cuneiform'.

The photo below shows Law 91 and Law 92 (and part of Law 93) of the Hittite Laws.
Law 91 is the row of cuneiform above the top horizontal line, and Law 92 is the row of cuneiform characters below the same line. A translation of these two laws follows:

Law 91:

If anyone steals bees in the sunshine (ie a swarm) formerly they would give one pound of silver; now he shall give five shekels of silver and he shall be free to go to his home.

Law 92:

If anyone steals two beehives or three beehives, formerly covering with beestings was inflicted; now he shall give six shekels of silver. If anyone steals a beehive, if no bees are therein, he shall give three shekels of silver.

NB – the sources differ, but generally a Hittite shekel is equal to the weight of 180 plump grains of barley, or about 9 grams.

Now, these two laws raise some very interesting points. First, the laws note that 'formerly' the punishment would have been much greater. The reference material I researched tells us that around 1800 BCE all the penalties in the Hittite Laws were much greater, and that these written laws actually record a period of great Hittite law reform circa 1400-1300 BCE.

For example, in Law 92, the punishment 'covering with beestings was inflicted' was intended to kill the thief. The beekeeper whose bees were stolen was to supply the bees. Of course, it was not a lot of good to that beekeeper, as their bees would also die in the process. In the great Law Reform era, this punishment was decreased to around 50 grams of silver, which was clearly a better outcome for everyone.

The second interesting point here is that, unlike the later English common law, the Hittites appeared to consider that a swarm belonged to the original beekeeper, and there is no qualifying requirement that the swarm be in a public place when retrieved by the original owner, or seek the permission of the owner of the land the bees finally alight on.

Finally, the laws show that a swarm was almost equivalent in value to two or three established hives. This reflects the common knowledge of most beekeepers that a swarm caught early in the season and well housed by the beekeeper can produce a bumper crop of honey.

If anyone is interested in the reference material I drew upon for this article, just email me and I'll give you the list.

Angela O'Neil

Letters to the editors

Tagasaste plants for sale

Hi all. We are also reaping the benefits of the May issue plant **tagasaste** (tree lucerne). With its early and long flowering time we are using it as a windbreak and stockfeed, which is why we are planting more. Jodie has been busy propagating extras if any one would like some. The cost is an ACT Beekeepers Association special of $1 each. They should be ready in a couple of months, and we will bring them to a meeting when they are ready.

To pre-order, email Mark and Jodie at alta.hire@bigpond.com.au

Jodie Umback

Letters to the editor may be emailed to *editor@actbeekeepers.asn.au*
or posted directly to your editor Peter Carden, 6 Wynter Pl. Hughes ACT 2605.

Opinion passed on by a recent visitor to New Zealand. Varroa was at first a nightmare but it's turning into a god-send. Why? Because the feral bees and the 'feral beekeepers' have been wiped out leaving only the real beekeepers who find they have vastly improved supplies of nectar and pollen all for themselves.

ABK Digest

Organic beekeeping

A précis of the article by Ross Conrad ABK May 09

'Organic' refers to a philosophy and a management style that promotes sustainability. It refers to approaches that care for the life in the soil as well as the plants that grow in it. It embraces the care of animals and minimises the use of non-renewable inputs of materials and energy. Under the 'organic' umbrella we also find social concerns such as the welfare of farm workers, and an overall sense of stewardship of the earth. Organic philosophy teaches the maximising of long-term sustainability rather than short-term productivity and profit.

The first step towards going organic with bees is to learn all about the life cycle, habits and instincts of bees and to do the same as far as possible with diseases and pests that affect bees and honey production. It is important to select bees with as great as possible natural tolerance to the pests and diseased they are likely to encounter. Considering a future exposure to the varroa mite, we need to realise that adoption of a 'zero tolerance' stance will preclude our bees from quickly gaining a tolerance by the natural evolutionary process. In practice this will mean using physical devices such as traps to keep the infestation under control while the bees come to terms with the parasites. Some useful techniques: install screened bottom boards; regularly make artificial swarms to break up the mites' reproductive cycle. One can also consider such substances as those derived from essential oils e.g. Apilife VAR, Apiguard, Honey-B-Healthy, MiteAwayII formic acid pads and Sucrocide.

Treating hives with chemicals toxic to varroa might give a short-term gain but, as is well known, the target pest will eventually develop a resistance. In the time it takes for the mites to develop this resistance the bees themselves could have developed a long-lasting resistance to the mites

Small hive beetle can be trapped and killed using vegetable oil before they have the chance of laying eggs and hatch larvae that can decimate a hive

Equipment can be stored in such a way as to eliminate wax moth damage.

In almost every instance where chemicals or drugs are used, beekeepers have safe, effective and non-toxic alternatives available to them for controlling honeybee pests and diseases.