

## FROM THE BEE HOUSE: SUMMER 2014

The last few months...

Winter was quite horrible for our bees in our part of Queensland.

I can't recall so much drizzle and so many cloudy days. The nectar and pollen got washed out of the flowers and there was little for the bees to eat if they could find a time to get out and forage. I can't recall a year with so little store left in hives. I had similar reports from other beekeepers in the district. Think of the poor beekeeper who is trying to make a living from the sale of honey.

And then the sun came! It was wonderful to see an extended period of lovely weather and the bees happy and flying and working. It took a long time before I could see any drones. Last year we had our first swarm on the 8<sup>th</sup> August (and on the range they were earlier) but not this year. I got a call for a swarm in September



and, *as you can see above*, it was a very unusual one. I could not see a queen and guess that the queen was lost on the swarming flight. It happens. Anyway I put the swarm into a box but later inspection showed that there was no queen with this lot.

By early October there was some surplus honey around thanks to a storm (and 35 mm of rain). It did bring on the clover and the bees loved it.

I did inspect all my brood (a spring check to look for any diseases and queen cells) and happy to say that all looked good but I found some spare queen cells and did a few splits. Too early to say if they took.

Just to make sure I would have enough Nuc's available I purchased a dozen lovely queens and made up some nuc's. When I looked all the queens were doing fine and they should turn into lovely nuc's. I will be doing more very early in summer.

A dry spell with very dry winds upset things a bit again. Warm weather without some moisture is not much good for the flowers. It is worse out west. I'm told that around Kingaroy there are plenty of flowers but they are all dry. The *Waterhousia's* are generally reliable and we may get a bit of *Brush box*. Something to hope for !

## The weather ...and bees:

If you look at our average rain for January and February in South-East Queensland, you will quickly realise that sooner or later (with very few exceptions) some days will arrive when the dark heavens opens and we and our bees have to deal with a lot of rain: 300 mm in a day is not without precedent. More is a possibility.

There are a few things to think about BEFORE the event:

- Make sure your hive stands are on a good footing. Skinny legs may sink into the soft ground and the stand and hive will topple.
- Have the hives leaning forward a little. Any water which is blown into your hive will be able run out. Bees hate getting wet. If they get wet they may leave.
- You may like to provide a "roof" over your hive to keep the worst of the rain off your hive. The hive will last longer too. *The photo bottom right shows an old "telescopic lid" being used as a second roof.*



- Secure the lids of your hive with straps or a couple of bricks. *Emlocks* are excellent for this. *The photo above left shows emlocks holding a number of nuc's together ready for pick – up.*

Should you be so unlucky and have a hive topple (it has happened to us!), what should you do? I believe swearing will ease the pain but it will not fix the problem!

- Stay calm! Put on your bee suit and gloves. The bees will be very angry. Prepare a new hive stand as close as possible to the old site. If the new position is further away then a meter you have a few extra problems as the bees will not find their way home.
- Re-assemble the hive as it was. You may need to replace some broken gear. Any broken comb with honey should be placed in a plastic bag so bees are not attracted to the mess or you add to the situation.
- When the hive is in place again - leave it alone. Retreat! have a cuppa (or something much stronger)

- If all looks pretty OK - leave it all alone for about a week.
- When you open the hive for the first time after the "experience" the bees are likely to remember, and may not be as happy as they were.

## Late Summer - What is flowering now?

Late summer is often a rather bleak time for bee forage. In South East Queensland the Eucalypts have mostly finished flowering for summer and there seems to be little to see in regard to flowers. Have a closer look.

With a bit of rain grasses will have grown to 1.5 m in height. If you go out early in the mornings, just about as the dew is drying off, you will hear the buzz of bees and will note bees busily gathering pollen (it is often a light yellow in colour) from grasses. Quite a sight on a still morning!

Looking closer there will be weeds flowering and of course the loquats too are out. Cobbler's pegs will be out and flowering in force - bees love them and in a good year they will produce some surplus honey.

The grasses will keep the hives going until some eucalypts are out again and provide the next honey flow.



*Bees collecting pollen from grasses*

## ROBBING

In 35 years of beekeeping I have never seen robbing in one of my hives or indeed signs of robbing having occurred. But it can and does happen even here. Obviously having never observed robbing I'm not exactly an expert. Here are a few hints:

- Some strains of bees seem to be more aggressive and are more likely to become robbers. We would not select queens from such hives.
- A lack of food is one of the reasons that an aggressive hive may attack a weak or gentle hive. It is a good idea to reduce the entrance so a hive finds it easier to defend itself.
- Leaving honey out is a bad idea for many reasons. One more: It may well get bees over-excited and lead to robbing.
- When harvesting honey, make sure you leave plenty of honey for the bees. Taking too much may well lead to near starvation and in a way force the bees to get honey by drastic measures.
- If you observe robbing occurring you will find "*heavy bees leaving the hive*", rather than "heavy" bees arriving and there will be war at the entrance) heavy smoking of the hive may allow things to settle. Other suggestions are to temporarily close the hive.
- Sooner or later (and maybe too late) the war will settle down when enough food is available in the wild.

## Summer is Small Hive Beetle time!

I check on my bees at least every 3 weeks. This may well be "over the top" during winter but I find that it works for me during the warmer and more humid/wet months.

I did have slime out again. It can happen so fast. Prevention is definitely the much better option. I use the SHB traps with Diatomaceous earth as this works for me.

## AFB is around!

I had reports from Maleny and close to the coast from people who had been hit by American Foul Brood. There is no other option than to kill the bees and burn all the material which has been in contact with these bees. It is possible (but for most not practical) to irradiate all the boxes.

Please check your brood carefully for anything unusual. If in doubt cut out a small piece (50 mm x 50 mm is enough) of brood and place it in a sealed and labelled bag. Send this to:

Biosecurity Sciences Laboratories  
 Health and Food Science Precinct  
 PO Box 156  
 Archerfield BC Qld 4108

The service is FREE.  
 Ask them to e-mail the result to you.

## Late Spring and early Summer - a busy time:



This is a busy time with harvesting honey and making sure the bees are happy and productive. In November we averaged about 30 kg of honey per hive. There was not a big flow but a storm or two at the right time meant that the White Clover did flower very well. See picture at left!

In our valley there is just about always something flowering and the bees do well this time of the year. We do need more rain. There is little ground flora flowering. The Eucalypts will do OK

and so will the vegetation along the Mary River.

### Try these tools:



My mate Phil swears by it.

It is a frame holder. Very simple to use:

- loosen the frames you want to take out
- grab a frame with the holder.

It makes working the hive much easier if you wear Leather Gloves and keeps your hand at a little distance from the bees. **Cost: \$ 15.00**



We purchased a lot of Electric Uncapping Knives from Pierce in the US. We have been using one for a long time and this is a good one.

**\$ 180.00 - ready to go!!**

***Beekeeping Equipment at very competitive prices.*** We keep adding more equipment to our list. You will find that we are always looking for the best possible quality and our prices are very competitive. Have a look here:

[http://ecologicalsolutions.com.au/bees/?page\\_id=8](http://ecologicalsolutions.com.au/bees/?page_id=8)

## News from Elsewhere.....

## Beekeepers sets city abuzz!

- ANNE WRIGHT
- HERALD SUN
- FEBRUARY 04, 2012 12:00AM

### **A BEEKEEPING company has been given a \$28,000 City of Melbourne grant to double the number of beehive sites on city rooftops.**

A local beekeeping company has been given a \$28,000 City of Melbourne grant to double the number of beehive sites on city rooftops.

Melbourne City Rooftop has a waiting list of 270 residents and businesses who want bees on their roofs, including Federation Square, restaurants and galleries.

There are already 30 sites with 42 hives in Melbourne and up to 20 new sites are planned for the city centre in the next year. Owners Vanessa Kwiatkowski and Mat Lumalasi want to create a different batch of honey for each suburb in Melbourne.

Each batch will have a unique flavour because the bees will gather nectar from plants and trees dominant in a given area.

"Initially, we were doing it as a hobby and just did it for free," Ms Kwiatkowski said.

"But after a while we started to build it into a social enterprise. We collect swarms and re-home them from things like compost boxes or possum boxes."

Mr Lumalasi said restaurateurs were the people most likely to "take the time to get involved and embrace it".

Part of their council proposal included buying a scooter to travel between hives.

Three companies received \$75,000 in the first round of grants. The second round opens on February 13.

#### **Advertisement:**

#### **Looking for a site to place your bees?**

Lisa (Mc Carthy Road, Maleny) 0402343281

Happy Beekeeping!

From the BeeHouse

Max and Trudi Lindegger