THE AMATEUR BEEKEEPER

APR-MAY 2025

Central Coast Amateur Beekeepers Native bee split

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Presidents Report

Vincent Schnyder, ABA President

Dear Members,

As we approach autumn it seems there is light at the end of the tunnel *(I hope it's not the fast train hitting me)* with feral colonies mostly succumbing to Varroa and the resulting onslaught of Small Hive Beetles hopefully subsiding.

When Varroa was first detected in Newcastle in 2022 we had a rough idea about what we had to expect from experience our colleagues made 20 years earlier in New Zealand. However, we were warned to stay open minded as our climate and vegetation is different and looking back probably one thing, we underestimated was the fact that no other country had SHB at the time Varroa arrived and thus the tsunami of SHB caught most members off guard.

The way we manage our bees has changed forever, however, with the experience gained over the last season I'm confident that as a community we will reach the other side of the tunnel.

Varroa Training

It seems some more funding has been found and additional workshops are being offered. Please check the Registration links to see if there is a course near you.

The Program website www.varroa.org.au is a great source of information including links to the approved treatment options and watch out for the weekly updates for further news.

Doug Purdie, ABA Vice-President & Editor to leave Committee

In late March Doug informed the committee that he joins DPI NSW as a Bee Biosecurity Officer and to avoid any perceived conflict of interest with a new role will step down from the committee.

On one hand it's great news that he was appointed for this role and the fact that in this critical time DPI NSW expands the coverage with three additional Bee Biosecurity Officers *(doubling from 3 to 6 positions for the next 12 months)*, him leaving the committee will leave a big gap behind.

Doug joined the committee at the AGM at Orange on 12 Feb 2023 and over the last two years was the Vice-President and Editor of The Amateur Beekeeper ABA newsletter. Previously he was President from May 11 till May 15 and Biosecurity Officer from May 15 till May 18 and was awarded Life Membership at the AGM at The Entrance in 2018.

I would like to thank Doug for his contributions on so many matters over the last two years and wish him all the best for his new role.

Support your Club's Committee: With Doug leaving the committee, we are down to five volunteers to run the ABA with its 38 affiliated clubs and close to 4,000 members which is in the medium to long term not viable, especially with some interesting projects lined up.

Thus, we are looking for volunteers who can either support the association by joining the committee, or offer their skills for specific tasks to support a specific project/initiative. Some of them require more beekeeping skills, others require administration, IT, marketing or other skills.

The committee meets online for 1½ to 2 hours once a month and depending on the role and tasks the overall time commitment is around 1½ to 2 hours a week. We use a ticketing system to share the workload amongst the committee members so if you are busy with work or other commitments someone else who might have more time can pick it up.

Please reach out to me president@beekeepers.asn.au if you are interested or want to know more about how you can help to run the ABA and support our clubs and members ■

Happy beekeeping

Biosecurity Buzz

Mike Allerton ABA Biosecurity Officer

Last Varroa Workshops

April/May will see the last of the Varroa Management Training Workshops for NSW. The Campbelltown workshop was April 4th for commercial beekeepers, but the remaining three are open to all beekeepers. Katoomba April 12th, Albion Park April 30 and Hunter Valley (Tocal) May 10th. The content has changed to include oxalic acid with the release of ApiBioxal, so even if you've attended a previous workshop there's more to gain by adding one of these to your list. Head to https://www. varroa. org. au/training to register.

Varroa One Day Workshop

QLD members have three more workshops at North Brisbane April 5th, Ipswich April 12th and Bundaberg May 10th. With the first detection of varroa confirmed in QLD, your new reality is upon you.

I estimate that varroa has been in QLD for six to 12 months before that detection was reported. Why do I say that? Based on my NSW experience and conversations with many beekeepers, I believe a combination of factors are at play.

First, until you see a mite up close and personal, it's easy to miss her presence. I've shown beekeepers in "uninfested" areas a sample of real mites. I've watched the colour drain from their face with the realisation that they had in fact seen those in their alcohol wash, but dismissed it as debris. If you wear glasses, use them when you wash and double check after you remove your veil. Take photos and zoom in.

Second, some beekeepers were reluctant to report their positive test for fear of the government response, so they kept quiet. In the eradication phase in NSW, that fear was real. It was a death sentence for your bees. But we are now in the management phase in Australia. The government is not coming to kill your bees. The opposite is true, the NSW DPIRD and QLD DAF want to help you to learn and to manage varroa for the good of all. Reach out to them for help.

Third, it takes time for the varroa numbers to build up enough to detect. Out of a bee population of 20K, 30K, 60K a sample of 300 bees is miniscule. The chance of you snagging a mite in the early phase of infestation is slim. When you do finally get a positive detection, the mite population is substantial. In my own hives, I was consistently getting zero counts even when I was surrounded by heavily infested hives within two kilometres. I had no delusion that my hives were mite free, it was simply that the numbers weren't yet high enough to detect. Then in Spring, my first detection was well over threshold. Mite populations expand exponentially. If only my bank account was like that.

Fourth, I've seen a number of beekeepers go through the stages of grief when they see that first mite in their wash.

Shock and denial happen almost immediately. It takes some convincing to get past the denial. They'll ask multiple people hoping to hear that it's not varroa, but the unwelcome varroa confirmations eventually lead to the next stage.

Guilt grips them. "I must be a bad beekeeper". "I caused this and my bees will suffer because of me".

As reality sets in, anger may arise, directed at oneself or others or the situation. Anger is an emotion that helps to reset boundaries when things seem out of control and imposing. The sooner you move through this stage, the better. I've known people that cannot get past this stage and live a miserable existence.

Bargaining is an interesting stage of grief. You may have thoughts like, "I will do anything if you make it go away". It's sort of hoping for a miracle.

If you can do a deal with God or the Devil, you'll be ok. Save your soul, though. Things will improve without holy intervention. Maybe Bacchus, Roman God of wine, could help a little.

Depression can hit you. You may feel overwhelmed at the sadness and hopelessness of the situation. Thoughts of throwing in the towel may consume you and some of you may succumb and quit beekeeping.

Finally, you'll reach a stage where you simply accept the new reality. Acceptance will allow you to clear your head and do what must be done to help your bees to thrive. Study up, devise a plan and incorporate varroa management into your beekeeping.

There's no schedule or rigid order in which you might go through these stages. For some it could take days or a couple of weeks. For others it can drag on for months. If you are aware of what's happening, you can move through the stages faster. Don't be afraid to seek help if you need.

The Propolis Envelope

Most of us are aware of propolis. It's one of the four items on the bee's shopping list. Most emphasis is on nectar and pollen, and water is also important particularly in the heat of summer.

Propolis is a mixture of various amounts of beeswax and resins collected by the honeybee from plants, particularly from flowers, leafbuds and tree bark. Since it is difficult to observe bees on their foraging trips, the exact sources of the resins are usually not known. Bees have been observed scraping the protective resins of flowers and leafbuds with their mandibles and then carrying them to the hive like pollen pellets on their hind legs. It can be assumed that in the process of collecting and modelling the resins, they are mixed with some saliva and other secretions of the bees as well as with wax.

These resins are used by worker bees to line the inside of nest cavities and all brood combs, repair combs, seal small cracks in the hive, reduce the size of hive entrances, seal off inside the hive any dead animals or insects which are too large to be carried out and perhaps most important of all, to mix small quantities of propolis with wax to seal brood cells. These uses are significant because they take advantage of the antibacterial and antifungal effects of propolis in protecting the colony against diseases. Propolis has been shown to kill the bee's most ardent bacterial foe, Paenibacillus larvae- the cause of American foulbrood *(AFB)*. *

The composition of propolis depends on the type of plants accessible to the bees. Propolis changes in colour, dour and probably medicinal characteristics, according to source and the season of the year. Moreover, some bees and some colonies are more avid collectors – generally to the dismay of the beekeeper, since propolis is a very sticky substance which, in abundance, can make it difficult to remove frames from the boxes.

In the natural distribution ranges of Apis mellifera, a multitude of traditional uses are known for this versatile substance. The Greeks and Romans already knew that propolis would heal skin abscesses and through the centuries its use in medicine has received varying attention. The ancient Egyptians knew about the benefits of propolis and in Africa it is still used today, as a medicine, an adhesive for tuning drums, sealing cracked water containers or canoes and dozens of other uses. It has been incorporated in special varnishes such as those used by Stradivarius for his violins.

Honeybee propolis under the lid of a hive

When I have removed bees from fallen trees or trees scheduled to be felled, I've noticed that the rough walls of the tree cavity had been smoothed over with a generous coating of propolis. I assumed that it was to make it easier for the bees to walk over, but there may be other benefits. There has been some speculation that the propolis envelope helps protect the colony from viral, fungal and bacterial infection.

** AFB is a notifiable disease and must be managed in accordance with the Bee Biosecurity Code of Practice.*

The standard hives we use as an artificial tree hollow already have smooth interior surfaces. I don't recall ever seeing such hives lined with propolis. There is however, usually a build-up of propolis where the frames hang and any small cracks as well as glueing the boxes together.

Roughen inner wall with cappings scratcher

Could our bees benefit from building a propolis envelope like their feral cousins? Although I don't plan to conduct a documented experiment to measure the effect, I don't see a downside to having a propolis envelope in every hive. You can encourage your bees to line the interior walls with propolis by roughing the surface with coarse sandpaper, say 40grit, rubbed across the grain. I use my capping scratcher to tear the pine fibres. It doesn't cause such a rough surface that you might lodge a splinter in your finger, but hopefully will result in a coating of propolis. We'll see next spring.

Torn wood fibres

Conference Season

With the bee season coming to a close, whatever that means in your area, the state apiarist's associations will hold their annual conferences through the cooler months. I'll attend as many as I can to learn from the various speakers/experts and will hopefully report notable news in coming issues of TAB.

I've been invited to speak at the Victorian Apiarist's Association Recreational Conference March 29th, making it the first conference of the season.

I attended the NSWAA Field Day in Canberra March 8th and helped out at the Canberra Regional Beekeepers information table. They had a beautiful miniature Langstroth hive complete with frames to demonstrate to children and adults alike.

Attendance was a little disappointing. It seems that beekeepers are not as keen to attend field days and conferences as they were pre COVID/Varroa. I encourage everyone to get to a conference. There's line up of excellent speakers and bargains at the Vendor Hall.

Tocal will be holding their Field Day in spring. There's a drive to return it to a combined event with much more ABA and North Shore Beekeepers content. It's shaping up to be an awesome day, so put it in your diary – 11th October at Tocal Patterson NSW.

Upcoming Conferences:

Victorian Apiarists' Association Recreational
29 March Sunbury VIC

NSW Apiarists' Association
22-23 May Ballina

Tasmanian Beekeeper Association
30-31 May

Crop Pollinators Association
10 June Beechworth

Victorian Apiarists' Association General
11-13 June Beechworth VIC

QLD Beekeepers' Association
19-20 June Southport QLD

Apimondia – World Bee Conference
23-28 September Copenhagen

AFB Minimisation Program

Clubs have started submitting samples for 2025. Contact your club Biosecurity Officer if you'd like to participate by submitting honey for testing. I'll send a kit with jars and return post to your Biosecurity Officer to coordinate collection and return.

Image by Georgia Department of Agriculture

One of the requests I regularly hear from ABA members is for the return of the "AFB Near Me" notifications. The program was dropped because the data was not accurate enough to be meaningful and only had postcode resolution. I attended the Bee Industry Biosecurity Consultative Committee (BIBCC) workshop 12th March where we were informed of a DPIRD proposal to incorporate AFB data into an existing app for tracing various agricultural pests and diseases. The app has a much higher resolution than the old system. A few details need to be resolved including privacy issues, but stay tuned for what I believe will be a useful tool for all beekeepers.

Club Visits/Presentations

I dropped into the Shoalhaven Beekeepers' February meeting where we had an informative conversation on varroa. They have only recently detected mites in the area with many members' hives still testing negative. I predict that next spring will see a sharp rise in positive detections. The mood was mostly optimistic with a thoughtful discourse on dealing with the mite.

Central Coast Beekeepers continue to strengthen, with quite a few new beekeepers attending the Beginning in Bees class ahead of the main meeting. They are actively encouraging members to enter competitions in the Royal Easter Show and regional shows. It's great to see them back in action after suffering a severe hit during the Varroa eradication program.

The invitations are coming in to speak at club meetings mostly about AFB and varroa. Many just want an extended question/answer/discussion session mainly on varroa. Sometimes I talk about my pet project Back Friendly Beekeeping. Let me know if you'd like me come to your club meeting.

Until next time ■

Mike Allerton ~ biosecurity@beekeepers. asn. au

"Always bee yourself and do your own sting"

DOCUMENTARY BEEKEEPING AT BUCKFAST ABBEY

What is the Buckfast bee and why did Brother Adam, its creator, become so famous? Was he the first to experiment with bee breeding and what inspired him to create a specific "strain "of bee? How did his objectives change over the years and how did he achieve these new targets?

Claire Densley and Martin Hann explain the history of beekeeping at Buckfast Abbey and the context of Brother Adam's work ■

CLICK HERE FOR VIDEO

How is the Club Hive Going?

Doug Purdie Vice President

In the last issue I had spent time using the varroa load calculator provided by Randy Oliver and come to the conclusion that a number of treatments would be necessary to keep the hive alive into Winter. The spreadsheet predicted a high mite load in January and so it was with some trepidation that I performed an alcohol wash in late January.

Ok so the spreadsheet is accurate, looking at that wash there is a significant problem and it needs treating immediately. The hive was a really strong one with two supers pretty much full with a few hive beetle visible. It was obvious from the tone – feel – vibe *(not sure what to call it)* that the bees were a bit disorganised, had not put on much honey since last inspection and it was clear that the high mite load was taking its toll. There was plenty of bees and 7 frames of brood but the bees had lost their vibe.

As it was a Saturday it took 4 days for me to purchase a treatment and return to the hive. Upon return I was confronted with a slime out and 1000's upon 1000's of adult small hive beetles plus the usual grubs and general stinky slime, all the honey was lost and the hive was dead.

So how did this happen? In the past I have only lost a couple of hives to SHB, I am used to dealing with it but have never seen it like this. The general consensus is that as varroa kills off feral and unmanaged hives the beetle numbers are exploding causing huge waves of beetles to invade otherwise healthy hives and cause collapse. Its hard to manage the huge numbers as oil traps quickly fill with dead beetles and become ineffective.

I was pretty devastated at losing the hive after all the time *(and money)* spent managing it to have it slime out was just so upsetting. I have been speaking to lots of fellow beekeepers who are also losing hives in this way. All you can do is check your beetle traps very regularly, while we are in this phase. This will pass but we have a few mountains to climb before this is all over.

If you have got this far in the newsletter then you would know that this will be my last article as Vice President for well who knows how long, thanks to Vince for providing a list of my positions on the ABA executive it seems I am a serial offender.

Recently I applied for a role with the NSW DPI as a Bee Biosecurity Officer and was successful I start my new role in April. So I will still be buzzing around looking at and talking about bees ■

RECIPE MELOMAKARONA GREEK HONEY BISCUITS

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups quality olive oil
- 1 cup brown sugar
- ½ cup brandy
- ½ cup orange juice
- Zest of one orange
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 7 ½ cups plain flour
- 3 teaspoons baking powder

Syrup:

- 3 cups Honey
- 1 ½ cups water

Topping

- ½ cup finely chopped walnuts

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven at 180C.

1. In a large bowl, mix the wet ingredients and sugar. Stir until sugar is mostly dissolved.
2. In another bowl, sift together flour and baking powder.
3. Gradually add the flour mixture to the olive oil mixture.
4. Roll the dough in little balls about the size of a walnut. Now to make them into the distinctive shape. Press the balls on a kitchen grater flattening them. Roll the dough off the grater so that the dough is in an oval shape with the top having the imprint of the grater.
5. Place the disks on a oven pan lined with baking paper. Bake for about 25 minutes. Cool on cooling racks for 15 minutes. Then flip them so that the bottom part is facing up, and arrange them tightly in a one or more of the baking pans.
6. For the syrup, bring the honey and water to a boil. While the syrup is hot, pour it over the biscuits let them sit for at least 2-3 hours, preferably overnight.
7. Turn them the right way up and sprinkle the walnuts over the top ■

Using Peppermint for Small Hive Beetle Control

Keith Barton

As you know, Small Hive Beetle (SHB) are a pernicious pest of our colonies here in SE QLD *(and any moderately warm climate)*, and frequently cause slime-outs and very poor colony performance. Beekeepers in warmer climates constantly battle these pests with traps, poisons, baits, and physical barrier controls, but generally, nothing seems to control the SHB without also impacting the colony to some degree.

In the past year or so there has been a lot of hype on YouTube and other socials about using peppermints in hives to help deal with SHB.

As an experiment for the 2022-2023 season, I trialled peppermints in about 20 (75%) of my hives to see if there was any truth to the claims I had seen.

After using peppermints in 20 of my colonies for the whole 2022-2023 season, my results *(far from scientific)* are overall positive. My observation is that peppermints have had an overall beneficial impact on hives at a reasonably affordable cost per hive across the season. SHB were not totally eliminated, however, numbers were reduced below a threshold where impacts were negligible.

Notably, I lost zero hives this season to slime-out, even in apiaries where the SHB pressure is very high.

I cannot comment on the specific mechanism that leads to lowering SHB populations. It could be that there are substances in the peppermint oil *(menthols etc)* that irritate and deter the SHB causing them to leave the hive. It could be that when the bees consume peppermint, the food they create is unpalatable or even toxic to SHB. I do not know for sure. However, I have definitely seen significant reductions of SHB in hives where peppermint was regularly present, without adverse reactions to the bee population or health.

Method

I used peppermint lollies purchased from Woolworths and found the “Extra Strong Mints” Woolworths branded product worked well.

All of my hives have screened bottom boards with no trays installed, and no entrance guards. My hives are situated on hive stands 2 besser blocks high to avoid cane toad predation and inundation during heavy rain.

I maintained a set of “control” hives that received no peppermints or any other SHB control throughout the season ie no traps, baits, ground cover etc.

Hives were inspected roughly every 10 days through the October - March period.

Peppermints were added to the brood boxes and supers every

inspection. Between 4 and 8 peppermints per box were added, placed on the tops of frames in each box or slid gently between frames if there was insufficient space above the frame.

I recorded the number of SHB seen during each inspection in relative terms and did not take any special action to find SHB *ie just normal activities while inspecting*.

Zero none
<5 low
<20 medium
<50 high
50+ extreme *(ie more than I could easily count)*

I did not squash or manually remove beetles from the hives.

Results

Control hives: In the control hives *(no peppermints all season)* the number of SHB was consistently high and the hives did not grow as strong or produce as much honey or splits. Some hives frequently had more beetles than I could easily count *(extreme infestation)*.

Treated hives: In hives with regular application of peppermints, SHB numbers were consistently low to none. This was true in apiaries where, in previous years, I have seen significant SHB pressure leading to extreme infestation and sometimes slime-outs.

Treated hives were consistently stronger and quantitatively produced significantly more honey. I had no slime-outs this season, even in the control hives without peppermints despite heavy infestations.

I had the opportunity to perform a limited trial in two commercial apiary sites across 64 hives. One site was particularly bad for SHB, and the other was average.

Peppermints were applied to all hives, and inspected one month later. No follow-up treatments were performed.

The inspections showed significantly reduced SHB numbers in hives, and the lower numbers persisted for several months. Unfortunately, these observations are clouded by the concurrent use of chux wipes to trap SHB in hive. It is therefore difficult to conclude that peppermints, chux wipes, or the combination were the cause of SHB population reduction. My assumption, however, is that both controls played a significant role.

Notably, at the end of the season in late-April, these commercial hives had received no treatments for several months and the SHB population was increasing in most hives. Winter migration of SHB into hives is partially responsible for this build-up I am sure.

Approximate costs

Woolworths Extra Strong Mints (0.4% peppermint) cost about $1.80 per bag. One bag will treat about 8-10 hives. The mints usually last about 2-3 days in the hive, but the peppermint effect seems to endure about 1-2 weeks. I estimate that I spent about $80-100 across the season on peppermints, or 2-3 bags per week, to treat about 20 hives.

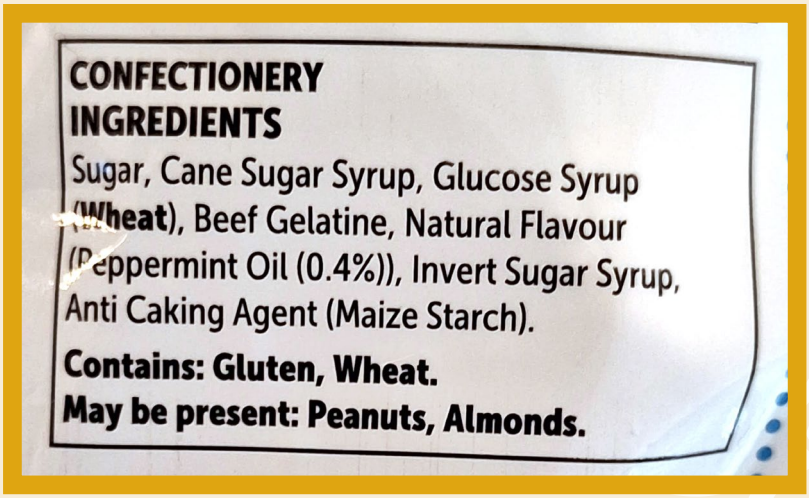
Future thoughts

Next season (2023-2024) I plan on using a peppermint fondant rather than lollies. I can make fondant cheaper and in greater volume so I don't have to be going to the grocery store as often.

A basic fondant could easily be made using glucose syrup and pure icing sugar, with peppermint oil at 0.4% by weight. These ingredients can be combined, adding enough icing sugar to make a virtually dry fondant mix. Chunks of this fondant could be added to hives sandwiched between parchment paper (or not) for the bees to feed on.

The strength of the peppermint concentration could be adjusted based on ongoing studies of effectiveness.

This fondant could be supplemented with additional essential oils to assist in treating nosema, chalkbrood, and other brood issues *(based only on positive verified research of course)*



Photos courtesy The Animal and Plant Agency (APHA) © Crown Copyright 2010

Inspecting The Brood Box

Fiona Fernie

Checking the welfare of our bees is the key to maintaining a healthy colony of honey bees. It is important for the beekeeper to use all their senses when opening a hive. Take the roof off and you should be greeted by a floral fragrance; that is your first indication that the hive is in good condition. If the aroma is sour or in any way unpleasant, your senses are receiving a warning that all may not be well in the hive.

Before going any further, take a look at the hive entrance. What activities are happening at the entrance? Are bees orienting themselves before going on foraging flights? Are honey bees using the Nasonov gland pheromone to help in orientation? Are the bees bringing in pollen? The activity at the entrance of the hive is a measure of hive health and the well-being of your bees.

Run your hand over the tops of the frames. If the bees are calm, the hive is probably queen right. If the bees are agitated or the buzz increases, then, perhaps, you need to check for a queen. If the bees attack your hands, then action is needed, probably the queen is not present. So far, all this information is gained from removing the roof.

When you reach the brood box, look through the frames. Are there any queen cells? Have there been recent virgin queens emerging? Have any queen cells hatched or have they been taken down? You should reflect on the weight of the honey super you removed to look at the brood box – is it as full of honey as you expected or has a swarm left the colony?

The foregoing questions indicate if you have a queen right colony, or if you need to look for the queen, eggs, grubs, larvae and capped brood. Depending on the volume of all of these brood stages, you will soon realise when the queen was last in the hive and laying. You may have a newly mated queen, a superseded queen or your original queen. As you use your eyes and ears you will soon see what you need when planning your next inspection.

The next check you are required to make is Varroa monitoring, then what is the state of small hive beetle. Disease checks follow – have you looked for American Foulbrood or European Foulbrood? This is prior to carrying out a full disease inspection. Are there any other nasties in the hive? Look for chalkbrood or waxmoth, for example.

How often should you check your hives? If you are in swarm time, then every seven days, as you look for queen cells. On the eighth day, the queen cell is capped and the swarm has gone. Fortnightly will normally suffice for the rest of the year and this means that there is not too much disturbance to the rhythm of the hive.

There is equilibrium to a honey bee colony, starting with a good laying queen and workers at all stages of reproduction. Then we need a strong cohort of drones. We reduce the number of drones at our peril! Varroa monitoring often uses drone

uncapping to determine the presence of mites in the hive. Necessary though drone uncapping is, for that balance to be maintained, we need drones and lots of them. Do not be too hasty to sacrifice drones – the colony is happier with a good population of males.

Rhythm and balance are key elements for a happy colony of bees and "reading" the hive is an important skill to develop. It takes time and experience to learn how to read a hive, but as beekeepers gain that experience, it is very enlightening. There is a sense of achievement as your knowledge grows.

Use all of your senses! Listen to what the hive is telling you, look at the state of the brood frames, enjoy the floral aroma as you inspect the hive, a light touch on the frames will not disturb the bees and your reward is a taste of honey. What a great activity beekeeping is! ■

The ABA Needs Your Help!

Photograph Courtesy of Fiona Fernie

TThe ABA would like to establish a photo library for use by clubs for written articles or for training of new beekeepers. Are you able to help?

We need photographs taken by our members, during any beekeeping activity. Hive inspections, beekeeper training, queen cells open, sealed or hatched, brood frames, larvae or sealed brood. Please give us pests and diseases, or any photo that helps to identify any beekeeping activity. Pollination of flowers or bees in flight will be warmly welcomed, also. Using a hive tool or lighting a smoker or brushing bees off a frame – all will help to build the ABA photo library.

What we ask is that the photographs are donated to the ABA and copyright is given to us in perpetuity; in return you will have your photo credited whenever it is used.

Central Coast Amateur Beekeepers Native bee split

Late last year one of the members of the Central Coast Amateur beekeepers his native beehive split, but it wasn't a conventional split. It was incased in a foam box! Whilst this was a great idea for insulation at the time this hive was created, they did not foresee the difficulties it would cause when it came time to split the hive. The bees in these boxes will actually create holes in the wooden box within and use the foam box to store propolis and even honey pots for extra supplies. This makes it more difficult and a very messy process when splitting the hive.

As this process is a lot more traumatic for the bees, it has to be done in stages. Stage one was to remove the foam box, spend a decent amount of time scraping off the propolis on the outside of the wooden box. The box was then put into a new foam box for two and a half weeks. This gave the bees time to seal up their holes and recover for stage 2.

Dr Alexander Austin, who is the Environmental Programs Officer for Ku-ring-gai Council and who runs their native bee program, came to assist the club's Apiary Officer Michael Graham and enjoy the fun for stage 2 of the process!

This proved to be also a little challenging and was enjoyed by some of our club members, who were keen to see a split in action! The first challenge was to remove the colony from the existing hive, but this was made very difficult, as it was held together by 2 inch nails! Michael had to resort to using a hook bar to get it apart. Eventually we got it apart and the brood split a little unevenly, but enough for the colony to be split into two hives. The club members were able to taste some of the spilt honey at this point. We collected some princess cells and placed them in the hive with the smallest amount of brood; to increase the chances the hive will have a queen. We put this weaker hive back in the original spot first, to encourage the foraging bees to go back into that hive and then a short while later put the other hive next to it, so the bees returning could go into either hive. Both hives seem to be doing well, and activity is present at the front of both hives.

Thank you to Jim Mitchell, Michael Graham and Alex Austin for sharing this experience with the club members! ■