



Next meeting | Wednesday 6th August 2025

Where | Johnsonville Community Centre

Editor | Jane Harding janeh@xtra.co.nz

Beginners Session: 6.45pm Upstairs. Winter in the Hive, avoiding starvation – with John Burnet

Main Meeting: 7.30pm

Movie Night, with popcorn!!

“A Bee’s Diary” This movie highlights how scientists are learning that each bee in a hive is an individual, with its own personality. Follows the circle of life of the honeybees.

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From the Editor

Janine is on holiday this month – looking after grandkids across the ditch, so no President's piece this month. Lots of good reading in here still though!

Results of the AGM

The new constitution for the Wellington Beekeepers Association was approved at the AGM, with a couple of amendments relating to the role of the club in supporting members. The revised, approved constitution will be available on the website shortly.

Also at the AGM, the following people were elected to office holder positions and onto the committee:

Janine Davie – President

Eva Durrant – Treasurer

Jane Harding – Secretary

John Burnet

Tatjana Manabe

Michelle Cole

Barbara Parkinson

Jim Hepburn

The membership fee was retained at \$25 pa and the AFB hive reimbursement payment was also kept at \$200 per hive, with a maximum of two hive reimbursements per member per year.

Membership Payment Reminder

Following the AGM, you will all have received a reminder to pay your annual subscription of \$25 to remain a member of the WBA. Please pay promptly, if you haven't already done so. Thank you!



Member Survey

The new committee has already met and has lots of ideas for the year ahead. One of the first things we are going to do is survey members on what they like/don't like and would like to see from the club. The survey will be sent to all members via email, so look out for this in your inbox.

Photo Competition in November

We've secured the services of the well-known Wellington photographer, Simon Woolf, to judge the annual photo competition. Simon is a very experienced nature photographer so we are pleased that he has agreed to being the judge.

As in other years, we will ask members to upload their photos to the club website and Simon will access the website to judge the photos. We'll also have our people's choice competition on the night, so we'll be asking people to bring a printed copy to the November meeting as well.

More on how to upload your photos shortly.





Book Review and Recommendation

Book review: *Best Practice Beekeeping NZ Hobby Edition* by Sarah Cross and Dr Mark Goodwin

About the authors: Sarah is a semi-commercial beekeeper with a BSc degree, who engages in research projects and is active on Facebook as Sarah C's Bees, giving advice to new beekeepers in groups like *Backyard beekeeping NZ* and *New Beekeepers New Zealand*. Dr Mark Goodwin has been an apiculture scientist for 35 years and has written several books on beekeeping, including *Elimination of American Foulbrood Disease without the use of Drugs* and *Control of Varroa: A guide for New Zealand beekeepers*.

About the book: *Best Practice Beekeeping* is an easy-to-read book for beginning and intermediate beekeepers – at 221 pages (including index and glossary) it only takes a few days to read cover to cover, and chapters can be read out of sequence. The book covers the same topics (a photo of the index below) as *Practical Beekeeping in New Zealand* by Matheson and Reid, but is more up-to-date and structures them differently: Most chapters (apart from “Diagnosis Problems, which helps troubleshooting tricky hive situations) are divided into

- Must: Legal requirements or absolute essentials to keep a hive alive
- Should: Important and science-based beekeeping practices to maximise bee health and productivity
- Could: Suggested practices that may be area-specific or don't have enough scientific proof to recommend them in the *Should* category
- Should not: practices considered detrimental to bees, general hive health, and productivity



- **Must not:** Practices that are illegal or will cause major problems for the bees, the beekeeper, or others.

This sequencing means some points are repeated several times in different chapters but also makes it quite easy to find information and form a plan of attack for different scenarios. Each chapter has several high-quality colour pictures to support the text, again making it a great tool for beginner beekeepers.

Verdict: it is not quite the definite reference book that *Practical Beekeeping in New Zealand* has been for many of us, and some chapters can feel a bit light. That said, I found a lot of little gems that I either didn't know about or had forgotten. It was comprehensive and easy to read, and is very practice-oriented, making it a great book to quickly consult before opening the hive. Will I get myself a copy? Absolutely! Normally retailing at \$30 (Ecrotek) Sarah is offering the Wellington Beekeepers Association the special price of \$20 per book plus GST, so I am adding it to my selection of reference books and can see myself using it often.

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18. Swarm control

Swarming is a natural part of honey bee reproduction which occurs in early spring in New Zealand. When a colony swarms, the old queen leaves with half the bees. A colony that has lost a swarm will collect very little honey as it will be half the size, so should be prevented. Colonies usually begin swarm preparations when there is an early, light nectar flow. As the timing of nectar flows varies between years, some springs are worse for swarming than others.

Must

None

Should

Requeen annually

Queens that are less than one year old are less likely to swarm so annual requeening is beneficial.

After swarms

Check recently swarmed colonies for queen cells as some colonies will swarm more than once (after swarms). After swarms are usually smaller than the first swarm. Any queen cells found in a hive 5 days after it has swarmed should be destroyed.

Could

Prevent swarming

The only way of preventing a hive from swarming is to check each frame of brood in the hive for swarm cells (Fig. 18.1) every 10 days during swarming season. Remember to shake the bees off each frame as this will enable you to see the frame properly, and to thoroughly check each brood frame as swarm cells can be anywhere on a frame.



Fig. 18.1 A queen cell that bees have produced in preparation to swarm.

Example of one of the chapters

The Club is proposing a bulk purchase of these books and offering them to members at \$25 each which includes freight costs. Postage to members can be arranged for a total price of \$34.

At the meeting on Wednesday we'll ask for expressions of interest in getting a copy of this book and look to get copies in for members soon.



What to do in August – courtesy of Waikato Beekeepers

Things to do in August

August 2025 in the Waikato: The Spring Awakening – Launchpad for a Bountiful Season

Kia ora Waikato Beekeepers!

As we step into August, the air in the Waikato carries a distinct promise of renewal. The days are noticeably lengthening, the sun's warmth is gaining strength, and while the chill of winter still lingers, our bees are stirring. This month marks the true awakening of the beekeeping year, a pivotal period where our actions lay the groundwork for a successful and productive spring and summer honey flow.

August is not just about surviving winter; it's about preparing to thrive. Our focus shifts from mere sustenance to stimulating rapid growth, ensuring our colonies emerge from their winter cluster strong, healthy, and ready to capitalise on the abundant nectar and pollen that will soon burst forth across our beautiful Waikato landscape. This means carefully timed inspections, strategic feeding, proactive Varroa management, and getting all our essential equipment primed for the busy months ahead.

The First Warm Days: Your Opportunity for a Cautious Inspection

After months of minimal disturbance, August offers the first real opportunity for a quick, yet crucial, internal hive inspection. However, timing is everything. **Do not open your hives on a cold, windy, or rainy day.** Wait for a calm, sunny day when the temperature is consistently above 12-14°C. Even then, work quickly and efficiently to minimise chilling the cluster.



During this initial "wake-up" inspection, focus on these key indicators:

- **Colony Viability and Queen Presence:** The most critical check is to confirm the queen is alive and laying. Look for fresh eggs and very young larvae. The presence of these indicates a viable queen and a healthy start to brood rearing. If you don't see eggs, look for young larvae. If you find neither, the colony may be queenless, requiring prompt action (e.g., uniting with a queenright hive or introducing a new queen if available).
- **Population Size and Cluster Strength:** Observe the size of the bee cluster. A strong, compact cluster covering several frames is a good sign. A very small or scattered cluster may indicate a struggling colony that might benefit from uniting with a stronger one.
- **Visual Disease Check:** While a full disease inspection isn't practical in cold weather, quickly scan for any obvious signs of disease. Look for unusual brood patterns, discoloured larvae, or any foul odours that might suggest American Foulbrood (AFB) or other issues. If you suspect AFB, close the hive immediately and contact AsureQuality.
- **Moisture Management:** Check for excessive dampness or mold within the hive. While some condensation is normal, significant moisture can lead to chilled brood and disease. Ensure ventilation is adequate.
- **Winter Losses Assessment:** Sadly, some winter losses are a reality. If you find a deadout, try to determine the cause. Was it starvation (bees in cells with heads down)? Varroa (mite debris, deformed wings)? Queen failure? Understanding the cause can inform your management practices for the remaining hives.

Feeding for Spring Build-Up: Fueling the Population Boom

Once you've confirmed your colonies are alive and queenright, the next priority is feeding. Even if they have some honey stores, supplemental feeding in August is crucial for stimulating the queen to lay at full capacity



and rapidly building up the colony's population for the impending honey flow.

- **The Shift to 1:1 Syrup:** Unlike the thick 2:1 syrup used for emergency winter feeding, for spring stimulation, we switch to a **1:1 sugar to water syrup** (equal parts sugar and water by weight). This thinner syrup mimics a natural nectar flow, encouraging the queen to lay more eggs.
- **Feeding Methods:**
 - **Top Feeders:** These are excellent for spring feeding. They sit directly on top of the inner cover, allowing bees easy access to the syrup from their cluster, minimising heat loss. They are also less prone to robbing than external feeders.
 - **Frame Feeders:** These fit inside the hive body, replacing a frame. They provide direct access to the syrup for the bees.
 - **Avoid External Feeders (Still Risky):** While temperatures are rising, external feeders can still incite robbing behaviour from other hives or even wasps. It's best to stick to internal feeding methods until the main nectar flow is well underway.
- **Frequency and Quantity:** Provide small, consistent feeds rather than large volumes all at once. This continuous supply signals to the queen that resources are abundant, encouraging sustained laying. A litre or two every few days is often sufficient, depending on colony strength and external conditions.
- **Pollen Patties/Substitutes:** Protein is essential for brood rearing. If natural pollen sources are scarce in your area during early August (e.g., due to prolonged cold snaps or lack of early-blooming flora), consider providing pollen patties or a pollen substitute. Place these directly on the top bars, close to the cluster, where the bees can



easily access them. This protein boost is vital for healthy larval development.

Varroa Management: Pre-Honey Flow Strategy

August is the ideal time to implement your primary Varroa treatment for the spring. Treating *before* the main honey flow ensures your bees go into the most productive period with a low mite burden, and it prevents contamination of your honey crop.

- **Timing is Key:** The goal is to treat while brood rearing is increasing but before supers are added. This allows the treatment to be most effective against the mites that are reproducing within the brood.
- **Treatment Selection:** In New Zealand, common spring treatments include:
 - **Oxalic Acid (Vaporisation):** Highly effective, especially when brood levels are still relatively low. Vaporisation is often preferred as it can penetrate the cluster more effectively.
 - **Formic Acid (e.g., Mite Away Quick Strips - MAQS):** Can be used when temperatures are within the recommended range. Formic acid has the advantage of killing mites under the cappings. Always carefully read and follow the specific product instructions regarding temperature ranges and application.
 - **Importance of Rotation:** To prevent mites from developing resistance, it is crucial to rotate your Varroa treatments annually. If you used one type of treatment in autumn, try to use a different chemical class in spring.
- **Monitoring is Non-Negotiable:** Always perform a pre-treatment mite count to assess the initial infestation level. After treatment, conduct a post-treatment mite drop count to gauge the



effectiveness of your chosen method. This data is invaluable for refining your Varroa management plan.

- **Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Reminder:** Remember that chemical treatments are just one tool in the IPM toolbox. Combining them with cultural practices (like drone brood removal later in spring) and regular monitoring leads to more sustainable mite control.

Getting Ready for Spring: Equipment and Apiary Preparation

The work you put in during July cleaning and repairing equipment will pay off now. August is the month to ensure everything is ready for the rapid expansion of your colonies.

- **Cleaned Hive Wear:** Your freshly cleaned and repaired bee suits, gloves, and veils should be ready to go. Having comfortable and intact protective gear makes inspections safer and more enjoyable.
- **Hive Tools & Smokers:** Give your hive tools a final clean and ensure your smoker is free of creosote buildup and the bellows are working perfectly. A well-functioning smoker is essential for calm inspections.
- **Assembling Equipment:** Now is the time to assemble any new frames, foundation, and hive bodies you've acquired. Having extra drawn comb ready is a huge advantage, as bees can immediately start storing nectar in it, rather than expending energy drawing new comb.
- **Supers Ready to Go:** Cleaned and assembled honey supers should be stacked and ready for deployment. You'll want to add them as soon as the colony shows signs of needing more space, usually when 7-8 frames in the top brood box are covered with bees.
- **Apiary Site:** Take a walk around your apiary. Clear away any winter debris, trim back any overgrown vegetation around the hive entrances, and ensure good drainage around the hive stands.



- **Ordering Supplies:** Do a final inventory check. Do you need more foundation? Any specific medications? Spare parts for your extractor? Ordering these now ensures they arrive before the peak demand of spring.

Queen Assessment and Requeening: The Heart of the Hive

During your first August inspection, pay close attention to your queen. A vigorous, prolific queen is the engine of a strong colony and a good honey crop.

- **Signs of a Good Queen:** Look for a solid, consistent brood pattern with very few empty cells. The presence of eggs, larvae, and pupae in all stages indicates healthy laying.
- **Considering Requeening:** If you notice a spotty brood pattern, a decline in population, or signs of an aging queen (e.g., laying drone brood in worker cells), start planning to requeen. August and September are excellent times to introduce a new, young, and often more prolific queen. You can order them from reputable queen breeders in New Zealand. A young queen will lay more consistently, reduce swarming tendencies, and often lead to a healthier, more productive colony.

Looking Ahead to September:

As August draws to a close, your hives should be rapidly building up. September will bring more frequent inspections, active swarm management, and the exciting prospect of adding the first honey supers as the main nectar flow begins. The work you do this month sets the stage for the entire season.

Conclusion: The Launchpad for Success

August in the Waikato is truly the launchpad for the beekeeping year. It's a month of critical decisions and proactive management. By carefully checking your hives on warm days, providing strategic feeding to fuel growth, implementing timely Varroa treatments, and ensuring all your



equipment is ready, you're giving your colonies the best possible chance to thrive. Embrace the increasing hum in your apiary – it's the sound of a successful season in the making!

Happy beekeeping!

Wax Dipping – who's interested?

The club will be organising a waxdipping session for preparing your new hiveware. We'll take a gauge of interest at the meeting on Wednesday, if you won't be there but want to indicate you're keen, please email info@beehive.org.nz and let us know.

Disposal of Old Hiveware - Free

As indicated in the last newsletter, the Club is proposing to organise an old hive-ware collection and disposal project similar to one held by Auckland beekeepers recently. We will collect this unwanted and possibly contaminated gear from your property on a pre-arranged date and time and organize its safe destruction. This helps to reduce the risk of spreading AFB (American Foulbrood), the spores of which can linger and survive in used hive-ware for over 50 years.

The club has reviewed how we might do this and have decided to offer this as a free service to members.. If you are keen to participate please advise the Treasurer by email info@beehive.org.nz your name, address for hive-ware collection and amount of gear to be collected i.e. estimate of number of boxes, bin bags etc.

Any enquiries to John Burnet 0274-379-062.



Hive site available in Whitby

Hive site offered to a beekeeper. Apparently site is sunny and sheltered with reasonable access.

For new beekeepers we suggest hive sites should ideally have:

- Good sun (preferably early in the day),
- Shelter from the prevailing wind,
- Good access (not on the top of a steep bank or roof of a garden shed!),
- Not close to kids' play area or vegetable garden otherwise a screen will be required to force the bees over head height
- Not close to clothes line – ideally a water source should be provided.

For further details or to arrange a site inspection please contact Kirsten Turley, 30 The Quarterdeck, Whitby - Phone 021-0267-6193

What's Coming Up?

September – Pike Brown from the Colony Loss Survey will be talking to us about the 2024 results and encouraging us to fill in the survey for 2025.

October – Phil Lester and some of his research students will present the latest in their varroa research

November – Photo competition with Simon Woolf to judge

December – Christmas social, Christmas quiz and the mead competition. Richard Braczek will be judging the mead this year.



Who can I speak to?

President – Janine Davie president@beehive.org.nz

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Secretary – Jane Harding 027 421 2417 secretary@beehive.org.nz

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