Wellington Beekeepers Association
Support and encouragment of beekeeping and beekeepers
April 2026 Newsletter

Next meeting | Wednesday 1st April 2026
Where | Johnsonville Community Centre
Editor| Eva Durrant edurrant@xtra.co.nz

Beginners Session: 6.45pm Upstairs

Wintering down with Eva Durrant

Now is the time to set up your hives for the winter. Healthy bees, warm with plenty of food will reward you with a colony ready for spring growth.

MAIN MEETING: 7.30pm

A speaker will talk about Anaphylaxis Shock and its symptoms, and the response required.

S

Note from the President

It's time to get ready for winter so this is where I say, "do as I say not as I do". By this stage I should have tested my bees using an alcohol wash then put in the appropriate varroa treatment. I should have removed all capped honey supers and left a box of honey for the bees. I have two hives and one is going according to the aforementioned plan. I have opted for Apivar this year in this hive as it still has a higher than ideal varroa load.

The other hive has some uncapped honey which I still have to remove and extract, A few frames are not fully capped so my plan now is to extract these separately and use it to make Jun which is a type of Kombucha which is made with honey rather than sugar. I have been treating this hive with Oxalic Acid vapour. I have been loath to open the hive up because I can see that the risk of setting them up for robbing is high.

Anyway, enough of my procrastination, I am pleased to report I have almost stripped all the paint from one of the outside walls of our house and it's only taken me 4 months to do so.

Janine

Swarm season 25-26

Report by Jim Hepburn

The collection of swarms is a service that our Wellington Bee Club offers to anyone in the Wellington region and includes Kapiti, Porirua, Wellington, Lower Hutt and Upper Hutt cities. It also provides these swarms to members who may want a colony of bees. This is a free service to the public This year calls also came from as far away Eketahuna and Otaki. The Wairarapa now uses the same WhatsApp approach the way we do and I was able to post the Wairarapa swarms directly. There were no swarms called in from Wellington, South Africa this year.

This season kicked off on the 16th of Sept with the first swarm being picked up by Oliver Seiler. It is still not finished with 2 calls in today (24th Mar) but most of the calls coming in are mostly wasps.

The three J's (Jim, James, John) co-ordinated the What'sApp group and there were 51 collectors on the list. With only 28 of these actively collecting swarms. There were about 15 swarm receivers listed at any one time. Not known how many of these receivers were fulfilled. Big thanks to John and James for providing cover when I was "Off Grid".

To date there have been 80 individual swarm reports posted to the What'sApp group. In addition to these there has been many more calls that have been dealt with directly by the 3 J's and not posted to the group. These were mostly not a traditional swarm in a tree but were bumble bees, penetrations or wasps. This year I have had 80 Bumblebee calls and I have relocated 2 hives. One from under the house of an elderly person who was allergic to stings and the second one was a builder who was removing a ceiling. When he pulled down the ceiling everything came down including bees and pink-batts. He shut the door and called me. What a mess greeted me. I was able to successfully relocate them to my garden. It was great to see.

90% of people agreed to live with the Bumbles after a chat and the same for some penetrations. Wasps were referred to an exterminator (Pest Proof Services).

It was again challenging to get responses for collectors over the holiday period.

This year I have taken 187 calls.

Summary of posted swarms -

Aotea 2	Kapiti 11	Karori 5	Trentham 1
Lower Hutt 9	Upper Hutt 23	Tawa 1	Newtown 7
Miramar 1	Island Bay 9	Whitby 7	Eastbourne 3
Khandallah 2	Thorndon 3	Belmont 2	Porirua 1
Wainuiomata 2	Wilton Bush 2	Churton Park 1	

Our champion collectors were Eva and Raj. Eva takes the nice collector prize when she visited a chimney penatration at a 90+ year old living at home alone. She was all sorted bee wise but wanted Eva to stay and chat. Took a while but Eva obliged and eventually escaped without leaving her phone number. I have also taken multiple councilling calls and covered a range of topics outside of bees.

The Zoo swarms made for interesting collection from the Meerkat enclosure.

Philip Morgan was also assisted by the local Upper Hutt Fire Brigade.

First Swarm 16th Sept

Newtown school sports finish line camera – No results available

No trampolining after school today

Tricky spot that needed a vacuum

Hats off to Johnathan Mould and the Karori beekeepers for the extraction. They did have to wait for scaffolding as it was at least 9m high.

A Frank special – waiting to catch the stragglers. Churton Park

Bee venom shock or anaphylaxis

Bee venom shock or anaphylaxis, is a severe, life-threatening allergic reaction to a bee sting, requiring immediate emergency medical care (call 111)

Symptoms appear quickly often within five minutes - including severe swelling of the throat/tongue, difficulty breathing, dizziness, and fainting (drop in blood pressure).

Immediate emergency actions

- Use an epinephrine auto-injector (epi-pen) if available
- Call 111 or seek emergency help immediately
- Remove the stinger by scraping it off, but do not squeeze the venom sac.
- Lay the person flat and elevate their legs to help with blood circulation, unless this causes breathing issues

Symptoms of Severe Reaction (Anaphylaxis)

- Respiratory: Trouble breathing, wheezing, throat tightness
- Cardiovascular: Fast or weak pulse, light-headedness, shock (drop in blood pressure)
- Skin/Other: Widespread hives, itching, swelling, vomiting

When to worry

- While most stings only cause local swelling and pain, a severe allergic reaction can also cause death if not treated immediately. Multiple stings (around 50 or more) can also cause a toxic reaction that mimics shock (vomiting, diarrhoea, kidney failure) even in people who are not allergic.
  This video shows how to use an Epi-Pen **Bing Videos**

  https://apinz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ApiNZ-Beekeeper-Code-of-Conduct.pdf

Wintering down

It has been unusually warm these past couple of weeks and the bees are still actively bringing in nectar and pollen. Native trees such as the Lacebark are flowering, as well as a large variety of Hebe. The herbaceous borders are also going strong with many garden flowers looking good. The warm sunny days are giving the bees a chance to bring in good winter stores.

Wintering down is an important seasonal beekeeping task

This time of the year as beekeepers we can make an enormous impact on the future of our bee colonies. Now is the time to think about how to keep the hives warm and dry over winter, provide good and plentiful food, and check monthly on varroa numbers.

Check list

1. **Check all frames**
    - Check all brood frames for AFB. Check the level of Varroa in the hive and re-treat if necessary. Add oxalic strips.

2. **Tidy up the hive** and settle the bees down
    - Remove empty frames, reduce the number of boxes by shaking the bees down. Two or three boxes is a good winter size.
    - Provide the equivalent of 10-12 full frames of honey for winter food. The outer frames in each box should be honey frames.
    - Remove the queen excluder. Bees will move up through the excluder as the weather gets colder and the queen **will** be left behind.
    - Reduce the size of the entrance to stop mice getting in and nesting in the frames.
    - Scrape surplus wax from hive parts.
    - Check and clean bottom boards and replace any rotten or damaged hive parts.

Wintering over a colony of bees in a top bar hive

By Tricia Laing

The type of top bar hive influences a beekeeper's ability to winter over a colony of bees. I have successfully used Golden Mean top bar hives to winter over colonies for more than 15 years. Key differences between Golden Mean top bar hives and other types of top bar hives is that the door is at one end of the hive and the roof is pitched.

Figure One: Golden Mean Top Bar Hive

To successfully winter over bees in a top bar hive beekeepers needs to know their bees so that they are well-fed, warm and dry. A beekeeper also needs to be guided by the weather conditions: the location of the bee hives out of the wind and in direct sunlight helps.

My hive boxes are made from macrocarpa and are not treated. They have a solid bottom, a pitched roof and a ventilation hole at the front of the roof cavity. I cannot stress too much the importance of warm and dry hives for successfully wintering over bees in top bar hives. Cold and damp

compromise the bee colony's immune system and this increases the likelihood that they will succumb to disease.

Drafts in the hive are different from ventilation. Bees will stop drafts by using propolis to close holes and cracks. Ventilation is about the air movement in the hive. In my hives the air enters through the front door then travels to the back of the hive and then upwards into the roof cavity. It leaves the hive through a vent in the roof cavity at the front of the hive above the door. The beekeeper needs to support the bees so that all their energy goes into keeping the colony warm. Bees maintain their colony between 32 and 35 degrees centigrade and a dry hive helps them.
Honey is both a food and good insulation. In top bar hives the bees store honey at the top of the frames that house brood and in the frames that

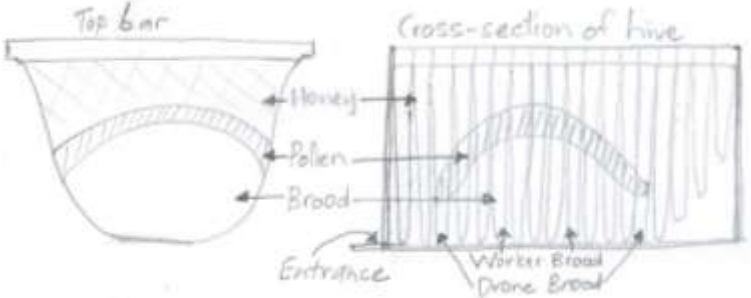

Figure Two: Arrangements of bars in a top bar hive at the height of the honey flow

mark the end of the brood nest. As the colony contracts during the winter the beekeeper needs to make sure that the brood nest remains wrapped in honey in order to keep it fed but warm.

For wintering over I remove two bars from the back of the hive and place a container that I can fill with Bee Tea if the bees need feeding.

Figure Three: Feeding Bee Tea two litres at a time

Rudolf Steiner's Bea Tea recipe that I use is as follows: steep two bags of chamomile tea in a litre of boiling water; tip the steeped tea into a jug holding three cups of white sugar and half a teaspoon of salt; stir until the sugar is completely dissolved (if necessary add more chamomile tea to achieve this); cool to blood temperature; and, pour into feeders.

The bees often process two litres of bee tea overnight, storing it in comb in the same way they would nectar. It is a good idea to check the next day (weather permitting) to see if this has happened. If they have achieved this then repeat the feeding process. I do not spray the bees with Bee Tea because I have noticed that they will groom themselves until they are dry before they will attend to keeping the colony warm. The weather dictates when I feed the bees. If bad weather is forecast I will feed the bees prior to its onset and after it has passed. I take the feeder out of the hive once a honey flow begins in spring.

Keeping the hive warm and the bees happy

There are several ways to protect the hive from the rain and cold winds. In some areas it may be sufficient to shelter your hives by erecting a fence or other windbreak close to the hives to deflect the cold winds.

If you decide to wrap your hives with building paper, remember to provide several ventilation gaps, particularly under the hive lid, otherwise the inside hive walls will become wet and mouldy and kill the colony. Wedge matchsticks between boxes at the corners to allow the hot air to escape.

Wool insulation 'breathes' and works well under the hive lid and around the hive. (re-use the wool insulation from delivery food boxes)

In the middle of winter take a chance to check inside the hive on one of those warm, sunny winter days.

- Is there still plenty of honey? If not, provide sugar syrup in a side feeder.
- Is the hive dry? Run you finger along the inside wall to check. If it is very wet, quickly move the frames into dry boxes and then provide more ventilation gaps.

Storing honey comb frames

Comb frames are valuable and time saving for the bees. Once I have extracted the honey from a batch of frames, I put them back on top of the hive in a robbing box. It will only take a couple of days for the bees to take the residual honey and wax scraps down into their hive. The frames can now be stored for the next season.

A good way to prepare the frames for storage is to dry them (wet frames could attract mould) and then seal in a large plastic bag and place them in a freezer for three days to kill any wax-moths and their eggs.

Once the frames come out of the freezer stack them into large snap-lock boxes which can hold 9 – 10 frames in an upright position. Make sure the boxes are well sealed. I keep them in the garage storage space.

It is very satisfying to have 40 or 50 frames ready for next year's honey season.

Golden Rod in flower

The Golden Rod rhizomes that were handed out by Lorna Zach last year have produced beautiful fluffy flower heads. Loved by the bees. Thank you, Lorna!

Trelissick Park wasp bait line

John Burnet gave a talk at the last WBA meeting about the Tawa Wasp bait line that he helped establish. I took the information about the bait line to the Trelissick Park group (I am a member) meeting a week or so later. There was great interest in exploring this.

Chris Watson, the Project Coordinator of Try Taiao & Wasp Wipeout, compiled a plan for Trelissick Park which will be implemented as soon as possible. Chris Watson estimated that we would need 50 bait traps throughout the park. Wasp Wipeout will provide training, help us set up the bait line and provide the Vespex which will be used in the bait stations. Volunteers who wish to help will be trained to check and service the traps.

There are several WBA beekeepers who live near Trelissick Park and would encourage them to find out about this wasp bait line and to volunteer to be part of the team that services the traps.

If you are interested in helping with this work, please contact me.
Phone 0273118700 edurrant@xtra.co.nz

Eva Durrant

Importing queen bees won't solve Canada's beekeeping problems

Item provided by John Burnet

Every spring, Canadian beekeepers await the arrival of queen bees crucial to their industry. The queens that populate Canadian bee colonies through the season largely do not come from Canada at all.

Canada imports approximately 260,000 to 300,000 queen bees annually from warmer regions like Hawaii, California, Chile and New Zealand because it cannot meet domestic demand….. Click on the link below for the details:

Importing queen bees won't solve Canada's beekeeping problems

Interesting bee facts!

Graeme Chisnal brings us some more amazing history tales about bees.

Bees feature prominently in various accounts of Zeus's birth and infancy – some state that the cave in which he was hidden in to protect him from his father, Kronos, was the home of sacred bees, and the bees fed him honey themselves. Others say that Melissae, the nymph who was shown the use of honey by the bees, nursed him, feeding him honey and milk.

The name 'Melissa' is derived from the Greek word for honey bee.

Fermented honey, known as mead, was first produced in ancient China around 7,000 BCE, making it the world's oldest alcoholic beverage.

In nineteenth-century New England, it was held to be essential to whisper to beehives of a loved one's death. This ritual, known as "telling the bees," involved notifying honey bees of major events in the beekeeper's life, such as a death or marriage.

Bee venom has been used in apitherapy for thousands of years to treat inflammation and joint pain.

Michelle Obama had beehives set up on the White House grounds.

The word "honeymoon" comes from the ancient practice of giving a newlywed couple a month's worth of mead — honey wine — to promote fertility.

The sound of a bee's wings is what makes the classic buzz. They beat 11,400 times per minute!

For the most part, nectar is watery and flavorless. Although the composition varies from plant to plant, on average nectar is roughly 80% water and 20% carbohydrates. Fructose, glucose, maltose, and sucrose make up the majority of the sweet stuff.

The thing that makes nectar healthful is the microcosm of trace chemicals from the plants. These include vitamins, minerals, alkaloids, salts, essential oils, and sometimes lipids. The exact composition varies with the specific plants and the climate and soil they grew in.

Part of the confusion over honey bees and honey originated with Carolus Linnaeus when he named the European honey bee, *Apis mellifera*, which translates as "honey-carrying bee." Because bees carry nectar, not honey, it was a poor choice. By the time he realized his mistake, it was too late to change it to the more accurate *Apis mellifica*, which means honey-making bee.

The second thing bees don't collect is propolis. Instead, honey bees collect plant resins from trees and sticky flower buds. They store this gummy substance in their pollen baskets and take it to their hive. At home, the bees

work the resins with their mandibles, adding stomach enzymes, saliva, and beeswax to manufacture the pliable substance we call propolis.

Because the resin comes from wounds and other openings in plants, it contains protective chemicals that shield the plant from pathogens and some predators. The bees take advantage of these properties to shield their own nest. The bees smear propolis around entrances, in cracks, and they even seal invaders (think dead mice) to contain disease organisms. They also use propolis as a sealant against wind and rain.

New emerging threat: the ectoparasitic mite

The global beekeeping industry faces a significant new emerging threat: the ectoparasitic mite *Tropilaelaps mercedesae.* Originally found only in parts of Asia, this invasive pest has recently expanded its Europe, sparking concern from scientists and beekeepers alike.

https://entomologytoday.org/2026/03/20/honey-bee-swarms-spread-invasive-mite-tropilaelaps-mercedesae/

Honey Bees dance better with an audience

https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2026/03/260324230105.htm

thanks to John Burnet

Who can I speak to?

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