



November 2026 Newsletter

Next Meeting

Date: Wednesday 4 November 2026

Where: [Johnsonville Community Centre](#)

(Entrance next to the Johnsonville Library)

Beginners Class | 6:45 PM – 7:30 PM | Upstairs in the Trust Room

Gear up for Honey Flow and Swarm control with **Eva Durrant**.

Our monthly Beginners Class features an experienced club member breaking down a core topic: from basic equipment and swarm control to pests, diseases, and legal requirements. Free for all members, and everyone is welcome. Bring your questions!

Main Meeting | 7:30 PM | Main Hall (adjacent to the Trust Room)

Following the beginners session, join us for our main club meeting for **Digital Hive Management: Tatjana Manabe** demos key hive tracking apps and digital logging. **Open Floor Discussion:** Comparing recording methods whether you use dedicated software, a spreadsheet, or pencil and hive tape, come share your routine and pick up fresh ideas. See you there!

In this month's update:

- Spring varroa numbers predict honey production 🐝
- What did Yellow legged hornets eat in Auckland? 🐝
- Bees in the City Auction 26 Nov 🌸
- Library Books 📚
- AFB Hygiene and Checks 🔥



From the President

Welcome to spring and one of the busiest times of year on the beekeeping calendar. I am hoping I have stopped my hive from swarming by splitting it into four. I made sure that each split had a queen cell in them. I have not been able to find a queen in the original hive but have sighted queens in two of the splits. My original (Queen Nefertiti) may have been one of them as she wasn't marked but as that queen wasn't looking 100% we'll just have to wait and see. It's possible that the queen had just returned from a mating flight in which case I'm hoping she has recovered.

Looking on the bright side, this brood break will knock the varroa back and the bees from the original hive can occupy themselves gathering nectar and building out frames. I really only want two hives so I'll either have some to sell or if they end up with no queen I'll combine hives. I have to say when I checked they all looked happy and settled (ie like they either had a queen or were expecting one).

I'm not sure that El Nino is going to provide the perfect summer, the weather has been a bit changeable and certainly windy but I suppose that is perfectly usual for springtime in Wellington. The cabbage trees around here have had masses of flowers. Now we just need a bit of calm weather so the bees can get to them and back to the hive.

I hope you are all ready for swarms and whatever the honey flow might throw at you – it's at this time of year I appreciate how good it is to have drawn out frames.

Janine



Spring varroa densities predict honey production losses and indicates a management threshold

At our October Club night, **Prof. Phil Lester** from Victoria University of Wellington gave an eye-opening presentation covering two critical issues for New Zealand beekeepers: the direct impact of spring varroa levels on honey yield, and findings from the recent yellow-legged hornet (*Vespa velutina*) incursion in Auckland.

Part 1: Spring Varroa Densities & Honey Yield Losses

While varroa is well known as the primary driver of overwinter colony losses in New Zealand, Phil Lester's team investigated how spring mite levels influence **in-season honey production**.

- **The Trial:** Conducted across 320 hives in the North Island (Halcombe) and South Island (Ashburton), tracking mite loads (via detergent washes) and colony strength every 6 weeks from October through to harvest in February.
- **Impact on Harvest:**
 - Starting spring mite abundance was the single strongest predictor of honey yield.
 - Statistical modelling revealed that **honey production declined by 2.29 kg for every additional mite per 100 bees** present at the start of spring.
 - Colonies starting spring with **>3 mites per 100 bees produced ~40% less honey** than low-infestation hives.
- **The Spring Economic Threshold:**
 - Based on these findings, and aligning with international research, Phil Lester recommends an **economic intervention threshold of 2 mites per 100 bees in spring**. Treating before colonies hit 3 mites/100 bees is essential to prevent significant crop loss.
 - While autumn treatments remain vital for winter survival (keeping levels between 1-4 mites/100 bees), spring monitoring must not be overlooked if you want a honey crop.

Part 2: Yellow-Legged Hornets (*Vespa velutina*) in Auckland

Phil then shifted focus to the biosecurity response on Auckland's North Shore, led by Biosecurity New Zealand (MPI) and SPS Biosecurity.

- **The Incursion:** Genetic evidence suggests the Auckland population stemmed from a single mated queen that was established in the 2024/2025 season. Extensive search

efforts through spring and summer saw dozens of queens trapped and nests destroyed before secondary colonies could disperse further.

- **What Did They Eat?** Using DNA metabarcoding on larval meconium sampled from Auckland nests, Lester's team analysed the hornets' local diet:
 - The diet was broad, spanning 77 prey taxa across nine arthropod orders.
 - **Honey bees (*Apis mellifera*) and horse flies (Tabanidae) tied as top prey**, each making up **31%** of the dietary sequences.
 - Other prey included native cicadas (*Kikihia ochrina*, 10%), blowflies (6%), passionvine hoppers (5%), common wasps (*Vespula vulgaris*, 4%), bumble bees, spiders, and praying mantises.
 - They also scavenged vertebrate carcasses, with DNA detected from mice, song thrushes, blackbirds, and sheep.
- **Nest Construction:** Nest material analysis revealed the hornets stripped fibre from over 118 plant genera. Native **kānuka (*Kunzea*, 28.5%)** and **tōtara (*Podocarpus*, 8.6%)** were the most heavily utilised.
- **What This Means for Beekeepers:** Overseas experience shows hornets hawking outside hive entrances can decimate foraging activity and collapse colonies. Professor Lester shared photos of the intensive physical defences used by European beekeepers—including electric wire harps and entrance muzzle traps—highlighting why early eradication here is critical to protect our apiaries and native biodiversity.

A warm thank you to Prof. Phil Lester and his research collaborators for sharing their timely research with the club.

Sir Frank Lindsay presented on AFB having recently conducted surveillance testing on hives in the Thorndon and surrounding area. It was another timely reminder, as we start to crack the lids on our over-wintered hives. Inspections need to be done every time you go through your bees, unpicking suspect or unusual looking capping's.

A little bit of advice included cleaning your hive tools each time you go through a hive. A quick simple way is to drive your hive tool into the ground then remove any honey or propolis from the face of the hive tool. Although this does not 100% guarantee the removal of all potential spores it does remove the majority. Obviously, any hive tool that has been used in an affected hive needs to be sterilised in a Janola mix or placed into a smoker and heated to kill any spores. Good beekeeping hygiene will reduce the spreading of this disease (including regular washing of your gloves, overalls and beesuits).

Takeaway points from the presentation.

- Despite killing about 100 bees, it is important to conduct alcohol washes of your colonies to determine exactly your mite infestation levels.
- Practising good hive hygiene includes scrapping or clearing away waste from your bottom board. Failing to remove this debris allows pathogens to remain in the hive.
- Bees that have been bitten by varroa cannot repair or mend themselves. When formic acid treatments are applied to a colony, bitten bees exit the hive to escape the burning from the exposed wound site. Normally these bees will not return to the hive, hence why you can get a pile of dead bees around the front entrance. You may also note a decrease in the colony size after treatment due to this phenomenon.



Bees in the City – Auction 26 November

At the end of the trail on 26th November, each giant sculpture will be auctioned to raise vital funds for **Life Flight Trust** – the charity that operates Wellington’s Westpac Chopper and Air Ambulance Planes, providing time-critical care to more than 1,700 New Zealanders every year. <https://beeinthecity.org.nz/> Photos: Michelle Cole





Time to Return Your WBA Library Books!

Heading into the summer break, our librarian is running an audit of our collection and we need your help to get the shelves back in order!

If you have any borrowed club books tucked away at home, even those borrowed months (or over a year!) ago please bring them along to this month's or next month's club meeting. No questions asked just pop them on the library table at the next meeting. Thank you for your help in keeping our club resources circulating!

2026/2027 Annual Subscriptions are Over Due

A friendly reminder from our Membership Secretary, John Burnet: if you haven't already settled your annual subscription, please transfer the **\$25** fee to the Wellington Beekeepers Club bank account **03-1534-0009311-00**.

Please note: members who joined the Club and paid their subscription after 1 Jan 2026 are exempt from paying again until the next financial year starting 1 June 2027.

For those who have already processed their payment, thank you very much for staying connected to our community!

Please Note: *Notices, listings, and member contributions are published as a service to our local beekeeping community. Any contact or arrangement made between members is entirely personal and does not represent an endorsement or warranty by the Wellington Beekeepers Association.*



For Sale: \$650 ONO

Everything you need to get started as a beekeeper.

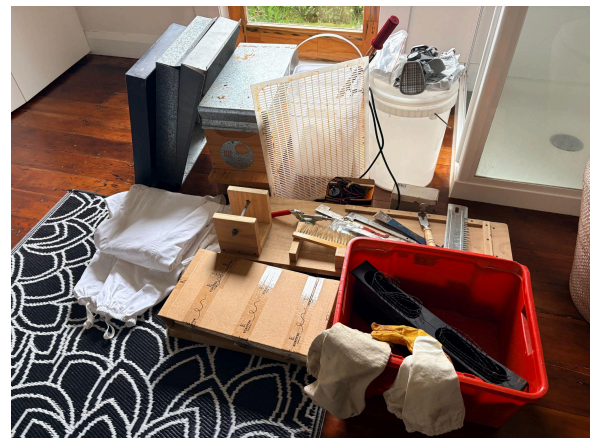
A retired bee keeper has equipment for sale. **Location:** central Wellington.

- 1 beekeeping suit - size medium
- 2 pairs of beekeeping gloves - 1 x long XS and 1 x short size 8
- 1 smoker
- 1 x nuc box including frames and a frame feeder
- Metal entrance guard
- 1 x oxalic acid vapouriser
- 1 x 12 volt battery and charger
- 1 x mask and cartridges unused
- 1 x frame assembly jig
- Wax foundation various thickness and sizes - in boxes
- 2 x 20L plastic containers for honey
- Metal hive tools x 3
- 1 x hive brush
- 1 x frame feeder
- 1 x top feeder
- 2 x metal hive lids
- 1 x plastic hive lid
- 1 x base
- 3 x full depth boxes
- 3 x $\frac{3}{4}$ depth boxes
- 1 x plastic excluder screen

Frames inside boxes - various condition (note boxes and frames have been kept indoors, and no history of AFB in hives)

Books (all good condition):

- The Practical Beekeeper's Handbook - Sammataro & Avitabile
- Practical Beekeeping in New Zealand - Matheson & Reid
- Control of Varroa - A Guide for NZ Beekeepers
- Honeybee - Lessons from an Accidental Beekeeper - Marchese



Contact: If anyone is interested please contact Dawn 021 0828 7473



WBA WhatsApp Group for advice and Information

Designed for members to connect, the WBA WhatsApp forum allows you to seek guidance from senior club members, ask experienced keepers questions, and share general insights about beekeeping. The platform is fully operational, and Sarah welcomes new participants to sign up.

To become a part of the group and find answers to your complex questions, please reach out to Sarah Dye at sarah.c.dye@gmail.com.

What's Coming Up?

- December | Xmas Quiz and Food Truck
- No Club meeting January next meeting February 2027

Who can I connect with?

- **Janine Davie** | President president@beehive.org.nz
- **Eva Durrant** | Treasurer treasurer@beehive.org.nz
- **Michelle Cole** | Secretary & Newsletter Editor secretary@beehive.org.nz
- **John Burnet** | Membership info@beehive.org.nz | 0274 379 062
- **Tatjana Manabe** | Librarian committee@beehive.org.nz
- **Kevin Campbell** | Webmaster webmaster@beehive.org.nz
- **Barbara Parkinson** | Supper Coordinator
- **Jim Hepburn** | Swarm WhatsApp Admin 021 926 823

We welcome your stories, articles, recipes, podcast links, and photos! If you have any content you would like to share in the newsletter, please email it to secretary@beehive.org.nz.

