

Welcome to the first of our seasonal newsletters to give you an update on all things backyard beekeeping and beekeeping in general.

We hope that you are all keeping warm and sparing a thought for the bees in your backyard during this chilly season. Perhaps some warm mead, braggot or a hot toddy may help you get through the winter months. We have been fermenting some fresh ginger mead made with our Messmate honey from the Hepburn Regional Park over the past month. Spring is just around the corner.

What's happening in the hive during winter & early Spring?

For the honeybees in your backyards Ballarat is a particularly harsh place to be during winter and early spring. Early spring in Ballarat is regarded as the riskiest time for colony starvation. We take a conservative approach to harvesting honey in autumn to ensure the colony has the best chance of surviving the cold Ballarat winters. The health of the hives takes precedence over honey yield in the lead up to winter. Being conservative in our autumn honey harvesting means we rarely need to feed bees during this period.

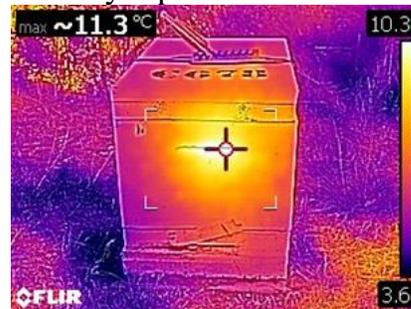
During winter and early spring your bees will be consuming the capped honey that they have produced and stored during the spring, summer and early autumn.

When temperatures reach mid to high teens, they may leave the hive to do a 'clearing flight' which is when they dispose of their waste products outside the hive. Otherwise if it's warm and dry they may venture outside the hive to forage, although during this period of quickly declining temperatures toward the end of the day some bees may not make it back to the hive before becoming chilled and subsequently die.

Opening or inspecting a hive during this period is detrimental to the colony. Brood are particularly vulnerable of becoming chilled which results in risking future bee numbers which ensure that a hive is strong.

Winter health checks: thermal imaging aids winter hive health checks

We will be trialing a technology based hive monitoring tool this season in the form of a recently purchased Flir Thermal Imaging



Camera. As winter and early spring are simply too cold to open hives in the Ballarat area we trialing this technology to

provide valuable feedback on the health of your backyard colony. We will be looking for a good sized nucleus (or ball or cluster of bees) located

toward the middle of the brood (or bottom) box. This location offers the colony maximum insulation and warmth during the cold winter weather.

We will be trialing this passive monitoring on some backyard hives during late winter and during early spring. If you would like a copy of the image from your hive please email us.

What do beekeepers do during winter?

Most large commercial beekeepers – those with generally over 1,000 hives will generally take a holiday during this period before preparing their bees for almond pollination which occurs in North West Victoria and South West NSW in mid-August. Commercial beekeepers will be trying to build hive strength for the short window of pollination of almonds which lasts around 2 weeks. Beekeepers who perform pollination services for almond crops are paid around \$100 per hive. For some commercial beekeepers, the income generated from almond pollination



services is more lucrative than honey sales.

We travelled to Euston, NSW in mid-August to learn about and observe the process as part of our continuing training and education program. Victorian and NSW Apiary Officers were inspecting hives using passive monitoring techniques (including thermal imaging) in these areas for weak and diseased hives.

Winter is also the time for building and repairing woodware and frames and planning the for the season ahead. Predicting the start of swarm season is also top of mind for most beekeepers who plan on increasing their hive numbers through the use of swarms. Ensuring adequate woodware like nucs – a 4 or 5 frame box is available to rescue swarms is important during late winter. Plans for re-queening hives and replacement of old frames and biosecurity checks coming out of winter will be planned.

Celebrating our award-winning honey

Messmate (*Eucalyptus obliqua*) honey sourced from the Hepburn Regional Park has provided our Ballarat Wild Bush Honey brand with its first award from the Victorian Apiarists' Association (VAA). The highly competitive Native Flora honey section was contested at the June VAA Conference in June. Being judged by your peers is always a challenging and nerve racking experience, something we took quite seriously in preparing the honey for competition.

Honey is judged on an international criteria including density, cleanliness, colour, flavour and absence of crystallization. Every beekeeper has their preferred method of honey preparation, many remain a secret. The method we use is only used for preparing competition honey as it is required to be heated above 40 degrees to avoid crystallization and filtered to remove pollen and wax particles. We use an unusual method of fabric pool filters to remove wax and other particles after warming the honey to around 45 degrees. No other honeys produced by Backyard Beekeeping Ballarat or Ballarat Wild Bush Honey are prepared in this way.

Australian Winter Festival at M.A.D.E



We ran free Beekeeping Workshops during the Australian Winter Festival at M.A.D.E recently. Topics included Australian Native Bees, floral resources for bees and supporting habitat for our unique native bee

populations. It's fantastic to see loads of interest and momentum around beekeeping in the Ballarat area.

Drone technology to monitor Eucalypt flowering patterns

During May beekeepers attending a Maryborough Beekeeping Field Day were treated to a demonstration of drone technology. In apiary drone use is being explored to identify the presence of budding and flowering patterns of eucalypts and ground crops like canola, fava beans, buckwheat, lucerne and clover.

The ability to accurately assess eucalypt flowering patterns has become increasingly challenging for migratory beekeepers in recent times as a result of climate change. Unseasonal weather patterns have altered the many of the flowering patterns of our Australian native plants resulting in uncertainty.



Have you used our library of beekeeping and botany books and DVD's?

We have a couple of new releases that you may be interested in. Please email us and we will drop the publications off in one of our Library Bags.

Calverley, J and CERES (2017) The urban farmer. Harper Collins

This book offers a Chapter by Benedict Hughes – The Practical Beekeeper who is a colleague of ours and the founder and Beekeeper at CERES Environment Park, a 4.5 hectare working farm in inner Melbourne.

Department of New South Wales Primary Industries (2017) Australian native bees NSW: DPI

This is fascinating insight into the world of Australia's 1660 native bees including solitary and semi-social bees and stingless bees. Valuable if you are fascinated with the Blue Banded, Leaf Cutter or Cuckoo Bee

Yours in beekeeping

Amanda & Scott

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