



OF BEES & HONEY

NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2008

THE WORKINGS OF WINTER II

Moving beehives to the aloe fields, as we have seen in the July newsletter, is only a small part of Highveld beekeepers' winter duties.

Some of these pursuits have to do with hive repair and making new ones, including catching boxes. It must be said that these are the same winter chores of beekeepers everywhere.

The catching boxes are half size of the broad chambers and have to be in place by mid August, as the new swarm season should be starting a week or so after that.

The main winter endeavour actually consists of replacing at least two frames out of the brood chamber of every hive a beekeeper may have. The

brood chamber is the hives' bottom box and where the queen stays and lays eggs. It has ten frames, and usually only the end ones get replaced.

These end frames, as a rule, only have honey and on occasion some pollen, but almost never any brood. The new frames will be positioned in the middle of the box.

To these replacement frames have been added full sheets of wax foundation, which have imprinted worker cells hexagonal shapes on them.

The male bees or drones are almost twice as big and aren't welcome at all by beekeepers, as they contribute almost nothing to a hive, except in

the rare in flight mating with virgin queens. I suppose that one could label beekeepers as some sort of sexist fellows...

The reason for such laborious winter activity is simply to make queens feel happy and homely. Like any other busy and fussy house manager they do not want any clutter around home when spring comes.

Another reason for their fussiness is that something is always left behind after each generation is born out of the same cells. Eventually the bees become not only noticeably smaller, but quite bad tempered. These shorties are locally called "kranz bees" and are the ones that on occasion seriously terrorise hikers along the

Berg. Once stirred, which is quite easily done, these horrors do not know when to let go...

The consequences for a beekeeper not doing his job properly can be most hurtful not only to his professional pride, but above all and like anyone else, where it hurts most, his pocket...

These results become noticeable when the first honey flow of spring arrives. Suddenly there are no more strong hives around, as they have been reduced to just half of their normal complement of between 50 and 60 000 bees.

Moral of the story? Lots of swarms around and no honey in the hives...

BEEKEEPERS

Almost all of the beekeepers make their own hive boxes, which consist of brood chambers, supers, which are smaller sized boxes for honey storage, lids and bases plus the internal frames. The reason for such hard wood work is not so much with cash savings in mind, but above all is a question of professional and personal pride in the way they house their bees. Or at least this is the way they like to see it themselves.

Besides personal versions of standard hive designs, which must be seen as not all that odd, some go through the large burden of time and expenses by patenting their own creations of machinery used in large scale honey extraction.

Others build incredible elaborate prototypes of trailers. Without doubt, the crowning piece on them must be the hive loading mechanisms, which without fail are both unique and ingenious.

You should see the long suffering spouse's expressions when they show

off their creations...

Perhaps it should be said that virtually not a single one of these designs ever gets sold.

One may end up thinking that beekeepers are a bit peculiar in their ways...

One of these oddities is perhaps not being all that keen in spending their precious time in socialising. It does not matter from which country or even Continent they may come. When invited to go somewhere, for instance to dinner, the answer tends to always be the same:

"I am very sorry, but at that time I need to go to see my bees..."

Perhaps the expressions to define them could be something like; sensitive and reserved types, of a solitary disposition and who find their happiness among this most sociable of animals.

The amateur beekeepers often see their hobby as some sort of affliction and suffering from "Bee Fever". This

condition has been described by an English beekeeper as "a form of mild insanity from which you never really recover".

Personally I put it in a not so clinical way as on a poster in my stall:

"Every fool has his quirk (an Iberian saying), Mine is beekeeping"

How otherwise could one explain the reason, or reasons, that willingly drive someone to spend night after night bending their back while working their hives and suffering excruciating pain with it? Either shivering in icy winter, or sweating their hearts out in summer with all the double layers of denim for protection, claustrophobic head covering, extra thick long rubber gloves and riding boots? Not to mention being frequently covered with extremely annoyed and aggressive bees trying all the time to find the smallest chink in the armour? It must be said that if an opening happens to be there, they definitely will find it.

Any reasonably minded person would have to agree that staying in the wife's soft and warm bed would be a far more pleasant endeavour... Don't you?

Ha! But there are some positive sides to such madness.

As long as beekeepers remain active (more often than not there is no retirement for them), get stung regularly without boozing with it and keep eating lots of bee pollen, they should live a longer, healthier and more fruitful life than most.

Years ago one used to hear stories affirming that the reason for the extremely long lived people in some areas of the Caucasus were due to the yogurt they ate. How come if all ate it, only the village beekeepers were positively affected by it?

Things like arthritis, gout, high blood pressure, cholesterol, Parkinson's disease and other auto-immune problems, including cancer should not bother them.

ALOE FLOWERS

POLLEN QUALITY

In the previous newsletter I mentioned the alleged healing properties of Aloe Honey.

Some recent work done at my bees in the aloe flowering areas makes me firmly vouch for the incredible strengthening properties of its pollen first hand.

Normally bee stings are regarded as no more than an occupational hazard by beekeepers, who have built up an immunity to its poison. It must be pointed out that normally all that is required to obtain that immunity is eight stings. After the bees have spent two months at the aloes this can change, and I describe it here with some personal experience.

Immediately as the first sting strikes in and the acute and long lasting burning starts its work, all the previous opinions and resolutions about stings being just a small nuisance will go overboard, even by the most die-hard of beekeepers. Steve, the stoic and unflappable helper was hit twice and in the same place on the lower lip and suddenly was emitting sounds that could almost be describing as whimpering...

By the forth on my face I was asking myself what on earth I was doing not

only there at that place, but above all in such a vocation... It took quite a resolution not to walk away and to turn back to finish the job.

In the end the fault was all mine. I redesigned a previously very efficient veil that had worked for many years for a perceived better one.

Basically the Velcro seal was not up to scratch, as the top layer of it kept curling up just a few millimetres, which was enough to allowed a few determined intruders' through.

The next day the tailor added an extra Velcro flap, so as to double its sealing efficiency.

I couldn't see myself doing it again without added safety assurances...

Three days after this occurrence the horrors were moved to later flowering aloes. Although both myself and helper were stung a few times while doing it, for some reason the sting had lost its sudden explosive power, as the intensity was no more than the usual irrelevant mosquito bite.

Luckily the new site is near some orange plantations and hopefully from where the following honey crop will come from.



COLONY COLLAPSE DISORDER

Bees have lately been in the news from diverse parts of the world as they seem to mysteriously abscond from their hives as if into thin air. While abandoning their hives, they also leave behind their young brood and even their queens, which normally they would never do.

If the importance of pollination by (beekeepers) bees into agricultural food production is taken into consideration, the stark facts are: No more bees means, no more fruit, no more nuts or vegetables.

California's almond production requires a staggering amount of about a million and a half hives for its pollination, some of them even coming all the way from Australia.

The contribution to American agriculture by bee pollination is estimated at about 15 billion dollars, or about 80% of its total.

Einstein did mention that mankind as we know it would cease to exist

within four years if the bees were no longer around.

Initially some quirky reasons were bandied about to explain their disappearance, like radiation from cell phone masts.

Recently most bee experts believe that bees could be falling sick due to a combination of factors, including pesticide exposure, invasive parasitic mites, an inadequate food supply and a new virus that targets bees' immune systems.

This virus seems to target the bees' immune systems in the same way as the AIDS virus does with humans.

The solution to this potentially cataclysmic event could be the replacement of the more docile and health fragile European bees for their much tougher African version.

While beekeepers that keep European bees in various Continents treat them for a number of complaints, ranging

from very serious bacterial attacks of "foul brood", to the parasitic verroa mite, as far as I know no African beekeeper has to medicate his or her hives for any reason whatsoever.

The Americans with their propensity for hyperbole have named the Africanized bees that escaped from Sao Paulo, Brazil and travelled all the way to their Southwest, "Killer Bees".

It seems that they are now the victims of their demonization of a bee that could be the answer to their existing problems.

The first thing a new born queen does is to kill her royal siblings, even while they are still in their cells. If it is taken into consideration that the European queens take 21 days to be born and the African ones only 19, in no time the African genes should take over. All it means is that the so-called Africanized bees should be almost pure African bees.

Before the African bees arrived on the scene in Brazil, where they were taken to and crossed with European ones, there was no large scale honey production worth mentioning. Now that country is one of the top four producers in the world.

African bees are not only more resistant to disease, they also are two to three times more productive than their European cousins.

Perhaps another American propensity, the "suing syndrome" that seems to affect them, may be one of the main reasons beekeepers there are afraid to farm with such demonized "pests".

Ok, they are tough and defensive, but wouldn't you be if you had two such incredibly implacable predators to content with, African man and the ratel? Perhaps pure Darwinism with its survival of the fittest may be a logical explanation for it.

NEW PRODUCTS

SUN & HEALING LOTION

Although it has been available for some time, I haven't yet described it properly.

The reasons for having spent such an enormous amount of time as I did in research trying to find the best possible natural ingredients from which an outstanding all-round lotion could be made, were:

- The double whammy of the Highveld very high ultra-violet radiation and air dryness.
- New research pointing fingers at Queensland where there has been a big increase in skin cancers due to the use and abuse of the so called "Sun Blocks" and its carcinogenic components, namely chemicals and minerals.

It specifically mentioned that after two hours of being applied, the UV radiation would break down both the UV protection chemicals and minerals used as reflectors, namely zinc and titanium oxides. When broken down they would be transformed into new compounds, which were then absorbed to the skin's deeper layers. Perhaps "time bombs" would be a reasonable description.

- FDA (American Federal Drug Agency) report that 65% of all "Sun Blocks" not only offered no protection whatsoever, but actually were quite damaging to the users health. Most of the others were not so bad, but didn't help much either.

THOUGHT OF THE DAY

Contrary to sugar, honey not only stops teeth cavities by eliminating the bacteria that causes it, it actually whitens them. This is naturally done and is due to its high acidity content. In actual fact, some people use it instead of the not so healthy soapy commercial alternative. A drop or two of propolis in it would even further improve its efficiency. When done, it can be swallowed, so allowing it to start doing its next jobs, like eliminating toxins from the digestive tract.

What a pleasure...

It should be mentioned that the tests done to come to such conclusions were on the immediate results and not on the long term effects.

- Accepting the reality that there is nothing out there that offers full protection from the mid-day sun and its three types of UV.
- Eliminating the incredible list of preservatives, emulsifiers, carcinogenic chemicals and minerals, perfumes, petrol based creams, animal fats and other undesirable contents in the ingredients list.
- To create a product that could be used daily as a hand, body and face cream/lotion/ moisturizer.

Literally, from head to foot.

- It had to offer some wide spectrum UV protection.
- Should help with allergies like eczema, other skin infections, sun burns, sun spots and insect bites.
- The outstanding and time tested bee products, Honey, Propolis and Beeswax would be central to its formula.

So far comments and testimonials from users have been exceptionally positive.



BEE PRODUCTS & DIABETES

- The body does not treat honey as a sugar.
- Honey stimulates the pancreas to secrete insulin.
- Except if highly contra-indicated by a specialist, honey not only can, but should be given to diabetes sufferers.
- Honey and cinnamon will bring and keep sugar levels down.
- Honey on its own can actually cure diabetes.
- Use of propolis can greatly reduce the daily intake of insulin by sufferers who have to do it, but without ever being able to replace it.
- Honey together with propolis should be able to cure most diabetic's ulcers. In extreme cases bee venom treatment may be recommended, by stinging the area around and below it, so to force the immune system to

rush blood and antibodies with it to the affected (and blood circulation starved) areas.

- Daily intake of Bee Pollen will add most vitamins, minerals, trace elements and amino acids that diabetics may lack to lead a healthier life. It should be mentioned that contrary to most supplements in pill form, Bee Pollen constituents are in absolute organic form, are highly concentrated, mostly in the right proportions and totally easy to assimilate.

Please see relevant information on medicinal uses of honey, honey and diabetes, bee pollen, propolis and bee venom on the section "Medicine from the Bees" of my website, www.thehoneybear.co.za

PS. When I mention honey, I mean pure raw honey, not the "commercial" equivalent.

AFRICAN TRAGEDY

My assistant Steve recently spent some time around Matabeleland in Zimbabwe. Like any other beekeeper anywhere he wanted to see what might be in flower at that time of year, and at least try to see any bees around doing their daily chores.

Intrigued after a week of not being able to see a single bee, he started to ask around if the people knew the reason for their absence.

The explanation given to him was that groups of wandering men were

going through the bush trying to gather honey by burning wild hives at night, so that the bees wouldn't have a chance to defend themselves. The direct consequence of these actions was that virtually all bee population had been eliminated from vast tracks of land.

What was even more frightening was that people in those areas had no understanding whatsoever of the importance of the bees to their well-being and ultimate survival.

FEEDBACK

Feedback on the contents of this second newsletter would be most appreciated.

I would also like your opinion on the desirability of the high concentration of information in it.

THANKS

To all the questions, comments and feedback on my first newsletter. These ranged from being a bit too long and "academic" from one quarter, which somehow I must agree, to being so positive as to be asked how soon I could send the next one. I was even asked for permission for it to be used in a chef's manual of instruction.

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