



OF BEES & HONEY

NEWSLETTER OCTOBER 2008

HIVE VANDALISM & THEFT

In some parts of South Africa the occurrence of such acts sadly seems to be on a sharp increase.

The neat removal of all honey from hives at a specific location, or even the theft of the hives themselves, can be done only by a beekeeper, or someone with a fair amount of beekeeping knowledge. The particular group of such individual(s) was not so long ago fairly easy to detect.

There is a well known fellow in the Brits/Rustenberg area that has become an urban legend in his own time. The reason for being so (in)famous is because, rightly or wrongly, he has been labelled as the accomplished expert of such acts.

You should hear tough and seasoned old beekeepers going on endlessly about his daring raids of cleaning-up hive sites. What perhaps was even worse in their opinion was his blood curdling intimidating behaviour when he was challenged.

It would take a very brave, or most probably a very foolish if not suicidal man to demand face to face the return of his lost property from such a fellow. If his expressions of uncontrollable and even mad aggression weren't bad enough, try to visualise them coming out of some huge and rugged fellow walking up to you, with extended arms like railway sleepers, at the ready...

By the way, the rest of the family seem to have come out of the same mould...

The Beekeeping Industry does try to somehow remedy the theft situation by ruling that as a proof of ownership each hive must have a member's number on it. Fine for the average type, but not for the determined few.

Vandalism is much more difficult to pinpoint.

Humans and baboons and to a lesser degree honey badgers are the usual suspects, as all seem to leave the

same destruction behind.

Perhaps only by the calling cards of their droppings can one deduct who really did it. Were they from the primate's group? If so homo sapiens, or their poor cousins papio ursinus?

Honey badger's clawing marks and massive destruction, as if a tornado has passed through there, is usually a clear giveaway.

Normally vandal's raids are made on a random basis, with perhaps the exception being the ones suffered around Piet Retief's bluegum plantations. Here the culprits are blamed to usually come from neighbouring Swaziland, and on the same systematic way that Lesotho's cattle rustlers do their "jobs" around their borders with the Free State.

Trying to combat the activities of such determined foes, various strategies have been employed.

Tying hives firmly to the ground seems to work for both baboons and honey badgers.

Basically to make the usual raider's trick of knocking down of hives much more difficult, and at the same time to give the bees the few extra minutes they require to marshal the numbers to get rid of intruders.

For the badgers, it works even better when the boxes are placed on pole frames one metre above ground, but this would be a godsend to baboons, as they could just push them over.

As we all know, humans are a different kettle of fish, so to speak.

In some areas it seems that it works by just placing the hives in an enclosure of electric wires. A solar panel plus battery are used as the energy source. Most probably it would also work for the other marauders.

For more determined areas, like in the Eastern Cape, even tougher measures had to be thought out. The answer

that worked there was provided by old metal ship containers, and almost like the fancy "bee wagons" of Central Europe.

The major difference was that now the doors were bolted and tied down with massive chains and padlocks. For the full opening sides now only small slits were employed.

Even such "tank armour" device would not work in Kwazulu Natal. The inheritors of such powerful martial traditions were not going to be put out by just any pretentious folly, even much less when left unguarded.

Those traditions seem to have had the upper hand for quite a while, and not until an innovative and deeply frustrated young man had a go at it.

His way of reasoning was simply that one should try to solve African problems with obvious African solutions. Nothing wrong with such philosophy, and could perhaps even be seen as laudable.

So, he started it by breeding his own version of African Bees. He did it by starting to selectively choose queens with the most aggressive offspring.

Eventually, and by day or night, when potential raiders were still some hundred metres away from their intended quarry, suddenly all hell would break loose. The brave Impis would not only lose their martial composure instantly, they would actually react as lions and even elephants do in the same circumstances. Run away as fast as they could, and while they were constantly reminded of their unforgiving trespassing sins...

If Zim bees were as efficient against marauder's as those in KwaZulu, most probably they would still be alive and marula trees bearing fruit.

Perhaps Zim's never had a chance. Not only were they raided at night when their guard is at its lowest, but in the coldest time of the year, when their simple act of flying is almost impossible.

NEW HONEYS

Last year's major Kalahari draught denied the possibility of Acacia Mellifera flowering.

Not so this season. At a distance, the leafless and seemingly dying trees of the arid lands of Northern Cape and large parts of the Kalahari were covered in delicate and tiny white puffs. Such was their profusion that one got the impression that a major snow storm was blanketing everything as far as the eye could see.

If there was a proper name that was ever given to a particular tree, this has to be the one.

"Acacia Honey Bearer". (Acacia Mellifera). It is also known as "Black

Thorn" and "Swarthaak".

The honey is straw-coloured, good density and of excellent flavour. Like the flowers it comes from, it is exquisitely light and delicate and with just a hint of herbs and citrus. It is also slow to granulate. Perhaps the finest of the light type honeys.

The good honey-luck seems to carry on.

It isn't every year that a beekeeper can boast of a crop of indigenous Combretum.

The honey is light, gentle and smooth to perfection. The exquisite bouquet lingers on, giving a very pleasant after taste.

ETHICS AND THE USE OF HONEY

The holy book of the Muslim faith, the Koran, mentions honey something like seventeen times. Accordingly, its use is highly prized and seen as a gift from the Almighty to humanity.

Extensive mention is also done in both Old and New Testament.

Equal praise also exists in the Indian Vedas, especially its medicinal properties.

Other people have diametrically opposing views, specifically the Vegans'.

The expressed reasons for such negative perspective on honey are:

A) It isn't a fully vegetable product. It has been pre-digested by enzymes in bees' stomachs.

Perhaps people with such views could be seen as doing some hair splicing.

B) Bees are being exploited by being robbed of their toils.

Well! Yes and no. The great majority

of beekeepers are ethical and fond of their working partners.

As most people know bees are born workaholics and their queens literally work them to death. In summer their life expectancy is no more than six weeks, as they can be replaced to the incredible rate of something like four thousand eggs/births per day. The mass of such a number of eggs corresponds to that of twice a queen's own weight.

Occasionally when a beekeeper is not doing his proper job (being a bee slave) and do not add extra boxes or remove existing production during a honey flow, the result of such oversight can be a bit dramatic.

Suddenly a particular hive is packed with so much honey that no more empty spaces can be found or used, and in sheer frustration is abandoned by its residents. Rather abscond and be at the mercies of the unknown trying to start from scratch, than being forced to not do ones duties. Seems to be one of the bees' mottos.

ORANGE (CITRUS) HONEY SEASON

Most probably it was due to a good water table, which must be the result of last season's excellent rainfall, as not a drop fell for quite a number of months prior to September's flowering.

Rain or no rain, anyone could see that Nature was showing her benign and fecund face, with veld and garden trees in such good shape.

That's the time when orange trees come into bloom. The resulting honey has a thicker viscosity than usual and is wonderfully light in colour and bouquet.

Some years the aroma is perhaps a bit too intense, which may lead some to notice a slight after-taste in it. Not so in the present crop. Just perfect. Perhaps the best of this variety that I have tasted for quite a long time.

Orange Blossom honey lovers are most probably going to have permanent taste-bud ecstasy for months to come.

As you might expect, beekeepers are just like farmers, who are known to be prone to regularly moaning about the vagaries of the weather, for not to mention crop sizes. Unusually, around Rustenberg / Mooi Nooi everything went according to their best wishes. Further north and to where the big guns go, the hot and very dry wind seems to have caused the later part of flowering to prematurely dry and fall.

After the almost lost Aloe crop, the possibility of a lot smaller harvest than usual (they are extracting it as this piece is being written) is causing some anxiety, as could be expected.

THOUGHT OF THE DAY

Honey and the proverbial pain in the a...

Recent research has confirmed the old belief that honey is an excellent medicine for haemorrhoids when taken internally, even being a cure.

What about using it the other way round?

Once a nurse (those incredibly practical people) told me the following story:

There was a patient of hers that had been suffering incredible pain for four days, and it was due to a haemorrhoid that had dried out while quite exposed.

In frustration she couldn't accept that there was nothing else that medically she could do, besides injecting him

with pain killers.

Somehow from the recesses of her brain comes a possible solution for it, and which was once given to her by her granny many years previously.

There comes honey to the rescue. ..

According to our heroine, within an hour after being "marinated" in honey the dried out and protruding appendage had become so smooth that without much ado it was easily coaxed into returning to its proper housing. She also affirmed that in the same afternoon the patient was discharged and went home.

Well done honey!

Anything wrong with the expression that honey actually works both ways?

BLUEGUM HONEY

The two main bluegum honey sources on the Highveld, Euc. Camaldulensis and Euc. Melliodora have for months been showing an unusual amount of buds, and are now in what could be described as a flowering frenzy.

Bees must have seen that and deducted that the Bluegum season was going to be an exceptional one.

How else to explain the super sized swarms that no matter how many boxes are added on top of their hives, they are still overflowing to such an extent that at night there is a thick mass of bees covering the front of the hives?

The super sized hive swarms seem to be immune to the soothing power of smoke. Actually they behave as if it's not only an acute irritation, in actual

fact they show all the signs that it is making them even more defensive than they normally are.

In no time the raider gets covered with a frenzied dark brown mass, which is looking for any opportunity to do serious damage. If it wasn't already bad enough, the sound they make when they are in this hyper aggro manner is really scary.

What about the profusion of wild swarms that are suddenly taking possession of any possible empty spaces, from tiny rat poison dispensers to large owl boxes?

The bluegum honey itself is of excellent quality and just like the others so far this season. Thick, smooth and with superb body and flavour.

FEEDBACK THANKS

All feedback on these newsletters are welcome.

for all the questions, comments and feedback on my first newsletters.

NEW PRODUCTS

The new batch of Mandarin Zest (honey marmalade) is so light and delicate, perfumed and smooth that it is almost irresistible. Just visualising it on scones or hot croissants makes me salivate quite badly...

There is a new challenge on my horizon, and it's called nougat.

For that I mean the ULTIMATE NOUGAT.

Any recipes?

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