



OF BEES & HONEY

NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2008

ALOE HONEY SEASON

Contrary to all expectations, the Aloe Honey season can be described as a bit of an unmitigated disaster.

All the various factors that may contribute for a good season seemed to be in place. The swarms were in excellent condition, the flowering was magnificent, the ground water content was good and the mild weather, including the absence of black frost, couldn't be better. When all of these factors come together, it should add up at least to a good crop.

Some old timers mention that when Mother Nature is too kind and does not impart some stress into plants, some of them will often end up only spreading and hardly flower at all.

Others put it more bluntly: -Lots of rain in Spring and Summer, high grass in winter and no Aloe honey in Winter.

Yes, that is true, as in the case of plants adapted to arid areas, like the Acacia (now *Singalensis*?) Karroo. Perhaps this tree "reasoning" could be translated as:

"Why spend the enormous effort trying to flower and seed, when Nature is so kind to us? Let's just take the opportunity to shoot out."

It may be there other reason(s), besides the "good time one".

Apples require 40 days of frost a year for them to be happy, so that they may produce lots of fruit.

Pears need 60 and cherries 80.

Perhaps the mild season did not have the right number of cold enough nights for the Aloe flowers to release their nectar.

Let's hope that some post-graduate student may one day find the right answer to it.

SWARMING

Early spring is also swarming time.

Nobody knows if it's the queen or the workers "collective" that start the ball rolling, so to speak.

What is certain is that come end of July the workers start building drone cells all over the place. After a short time it is the turn for the large queen cells to start being constructed.

In a totally atypical way to the usually precise engineers the worker bees are, these cells get attached singly to the comb in a random form, as if no more than an afterthought. They may look like lonely amphoras suspended somewhere in the middle of a wall.

The only purpose in life for the drones is to pass their sperm (and genes with it) on virgin queens' during their nuptial flights. The very few who manage such accomplishment end up losing their sexual organs.

End result? They drop stone dead.

This tragic even happens while their sexual instruments together with other previous ones are still stacked together like macabre trophies in the queen's cloaks. Perhaps it could also remind of bullfighting bandarillas,

those flowery harpooned sticks dangle on a bulls back.

What a glorious way to go, some may say.

To others, somewhat more cynical, they may make the point that they know of some fellows which appear to believe that the impregnation thing is the sole purpose of their existence.

Let's stop the philosophizing thing and get back to the point...

17 days after hatching (African bees) and while still enclosed in their royal cells, the new queens start emitting piping sounds. Besides being individually distinct to the point of having quite different pitches and being of different notes, they also come across quite loud and actually trumpet like.

By this time the old monarch knows that her time is over. Immediately there is a special buzz around as she marshals her troops. While surrounded by her followers she walks out of the hive and flies away with half of the swarm, to start a new life elsewhere.

After two days with the hive having been queenless, the first born of the royal princesses uses her regal sting

for the sole purpose it was created for. To quickly dispatch other royal pretenders. She will never use it for any other purpose, regardless who may threaten her.

The birth cells of the unborn princesses will also become their final sarcophagus.

If it happens that two of them may come out at approximately the same time, a fight to the death will occur. One may deduct that just like in nature, the strong shall inherit the earth, I mean, the hive, in this case.

I am afraid to say, but it seems that in the hives they don't send unwanted princesses to rot away in convents...

In actual fact similar "succession" rituals happen in the Ottoman Empire to those in the hive.

The boldest, or at least the one who manage to get the backing of the palace army of eunuchs, to grab power to follow his father steps as a Sultan, had to have all his male siblings strangled (garrotted). If one considers the occupation rate in the seraglio, the number of brothers could number quite a few dozen. As an integral part of this serial fratricidal act, it had to be done with a royal silk rope.

GLOBAL WARMING

There must be something in it. The seasons aren't the same any longer, specially the present one.

Some bluegum species kept flowering throughout winter, to the point that when spring arrived, when normally they should be starting to bloom, that's when they actually stopped.

What's worse from a beekeepers point of view was that the nights in this winter were still cold enough for the flowers not to secrete sufficient nectar, so that the bees couldn't

make any honey out of it.

Oranges started their flowering two weeks earlier than normal.

According to some beekeepers, some bush plants were quite ahead in the blooming race, doing it three weeks ahead of their usual time.

What has happened to the daily heavy frosts that used to keep the bluegums from flowering in winter?

Is this just a small and temporary adjustment in the global weather

patterns, or a precursor of major changes to come?

It must be taken into account that throughout Earth's existence such a thing as "normal" or "permanent" climate has never existed.

If Earth's age is taken in comparison, the last Glacial Age only finished a few minutes ago.

Actually it was just about the time when agriculture, and sedentary life with it, started.

WHAT'S PROPOLIS

Let me start by making quite a bold statement.

Honey bees shouldn't even exist.

Although social bees are perhaps the most hygiene conscious social group there is, they end up living in terrible health hazardous conditions.

If one adds the incredible massive overcrowding of sixty thousand bees is something like 0.1m³, with constant temperature of between 36 and 38c, plus high humidity, any bee hive should be a Calcutta's caldron multiplied by many factors. A truly nightmarish scenario.

If that wasn't enough, what about filling most of the space with sugar?

When all these conditions come together, then one should have the ideal milieu for the first arrived spore or virus to propagate at such frightening pace, which without doubt should in no time wipe out the residents with it.

Actually, similar conditions as the ones just described are created in laboratories for propagation of bacteria, fungus and virus.

Ok! Yes. If that's the case, how come bees have been on earth since the dawn of the flowers, some 130 million years ago?

Any type of honeybees that normally live in cavities be they from the tiny "mopani" bees, also known as "mopani flies" to the largest of them, to be able to survive such conditions they learned to use the "medicine" that the plants themselves previously developed for exactly the same purpose.

The most nutrients rich part of any plant is its buds. These will either develop into leaves, or in flowers & seeds. The former becomes the plant factories and the other fulfils the most important function of any living organism, which is to reproduce itself.

Whenever there is some richness somewhere in nature, certainly there will also be some opportunistic parasite/predator trying to live off it.

The way some plants protect their buds from microbial attacks is by secreting under them tiny amounts of resin, which is rich in specific compounds.

Other function of this resin is for UV protection, as the plants seem to prefer to propagate exact copies of themselves, and not of mutants.

Since the earliest antiquity man has used propolis for its medicinal uses.

The word itself is archaic Greek and stands for: "Defender of the city".
Pro – Polis.



It is said that Aristotle's named it. In any case he did write a major treaty on its medicinal uses.

Let me tell you a quite interesting story about propolis in the South Africa contest.

Before the onset of the Anglo Boer war, the Germans not only supplied the Boers with Mauser rifles, as everybody knows, but also field hospitals.

When a British soldier got wounded and if lucky eventually arrived at

one of their hospitals, unfortunately for most probably ended up with either gangrene or septicaemia. It can't really be said that those health facilities were in a healthy state of affairs.

On the Boer side their wounded got "repaired" well and quickly, so that they would live to fight another day.

The difference was that besides the famous rifles and hospitals, the German's also provided the medicine used in them.

One of these medicines is now regarded as the best natural antibiotic there is. It was supplied in tincture form and its name is propolis.

Perhaps it could also be mentioned that long before its use in this conflict, which happened at the turn of the twentieth century, while in campaign the Roman legionaries carried the exact same medicine with them, but then in raw form.

The best description of propolis that I know is by the well known scientist Prof. Mizrahi

"Propolis is considered to be the natural product with the highest anti-microbial activity acting against the widest spectrum of bacteria,

fungi and viruses - even more than that of honey. It has been called the optimal natural antibiotic".

While this newsletter is being written some health news just appear on the web with the title:

BLEEDING GUMS UP HEART ATTACK RISK

"...The mouth is probably the dirtiest place in the human body," said Steve Kerrigan of the Royal College of Surgeons, adding, "If you have an open blood vessel from bleeding gums, bacteria will gain entry to your bloodstream."

"After entering the blood stream, some bacteria stick onto platelets, causing them to clot inside vessels and decrease the blood flow to the heart."

Why not avoid this situation by having the most hygienic mouth possible?

All that has to be done is simply to rinse the mouth with diluted propolis (+- 1/10) after brushing the teeth.

The way I do it is to add 10 to 15 drops of propolis to water in the mouth, mouth wash and swallow. (As mentioned in last newsletter, one may add a couple of drops into some honey and use it instead of tooth paste)

No more cavities, mouth ulcers, bleeding gums and gingivitis. Not to mention septic throats and a great improvement on pluck (up to 65%) and sinusitis.

You can't really beat it.

There is so much more that could be written about this subject, but most probably we have run out of space and perhaps even of people's patience.

On my website, www.thehoneybear.co.za in the section "Medicine from the bees" there is extensive scientific research on Propolis and its uses.

BEEKEEPERS IN EUROPE

In Central Europe Beekeepers build quite ornate huts on top of trailers where regional design embellishments are the order of the day. On them they stack two hives on top of each other and in two rows facing outside. In between them they place an extracting machine, plus filters and storing containers. Perhaps quite ornate and very efficient bee

huts would be a better description.

At the beginning of spring these portable huts are first moved to fruit orchards for paying pollination. At their arrival the side panels get lifted horizontally, the entrance of the hives open to release the keenest workers there are and the start of one more annual ritual. These panels

have been closed for protection from the icy weather.

Can one imagine the release of pent up energy and frustrations of these workaholics when let free in a sunny day? In reality they have been locked up since the end of summer, which is more than six months.

To show how bees are respected and even treated as an integral part of families, in various parts of Europe there is an ancient and perhaps almost sacred pagan ritual of having to tell the residents of their hives of important family news. Specifically they have to hear if one of them was born, got married or passed away.

FOLLOW UP ON AN AFRICAN TRAGEDY

The hive burning madness seems to have been going on for some time. According to some accounts, the population in large areas of Matabeleland have become totally mystified by nature's unexplainable behaviour.

"How come there haven't been any wild fruits like marula in the bush for some years now, even though the trees have had normal seasonal flowerings?"

They ask themselves in sad bewilderment, as by now even this nature's life giving bounty is being negated to them.

It should be mentioned that the widespread hunger that is being felt for some time now in that part of the world, has been caused by the double wham of successive crop failures and the colossal economical mismanagement by its Government.

THOUGHT OF THE DAY

In South Africa the use of honey in hospitals for the treatment of burns, wounds and ulcers is probably still frowned upon by the conservative old timer professors.

In European hospitals, namely in UK and Germany, they have not only any problem with it, actually they have embraced it totally.

Honey's healing happens faster and with much less pain than other product for the same burns, wounds or ulcers. In actual fact does it with minimal scaring.

Let me tell you a story about it.

There is a leather goods man that sells his wares at the same Organic Market as myself. Like all good leather workers he also uses extremely sharp knives. Suffice to say that now and then all of them end up chopping at their own hands, especially the fingers.

According to our own finger chopping fellows own words, he has a most incredible and efficient way to deal with such occupational hazard occurrences.

Whenever it happens that he almost severs one of the five extremities protruding out of each one of his hands, he just has to follow a well practised routine. (By the way, he still can count up to ten on his fingers)

It basically consists of "marinating" the offended part in honey for three whole days. Suffice to say that he has to keep the sticky medicine in place, which otherwise should be leaking all over the place. Nobody would want that. Would we?

Believe it or not, for that purpose he always keeps a good stock of the recently well promoted condoms. No! No! Believe me, there isn't anything kinky about it.

Again according to our own hero (and digit prophylactic user), after those three days of pickling the abused and almost chopped off extremity is as good as new and perhaps even ready for more of the usual abuse. In actual fact and with as much conviction as he can muster, he also affirms that more often than not he battles to locate the exact area were the nasty deed did occur.

ORANGE (CITRUS) HONEY SEASON

Let's also hope that the next honey crop, the citrus, will have better results than the Aloe one.

During September of last year we were in the grip of a major drought and if it wasn't enough, after the first two weeks of flowering a heat wave struck the flowering very badly. It should be mentioned that the citrus

flowering only goes for a month. The direct consequence of it was that no more nectar could be harvest by the bees after that.

So far this year's orange honey season looks very promising. Let's hope that it carry's on and that we will be able to savour its high quality, mild and perfumed honey for many months to come.



NEW PRODUCTS

Now and then one may see somebody spraying some nasty smelling cans' contents into tables and other furniture. Afterwards we may also see the same frustrated being slaving for nothing while trying to even out the resulting ugly strips. Or worse, trying to reduce some of the gunk accumulated over many years.

The new product is called "Wood polish".

The ingredients used are; beeswax,

natural turpentine (from pine resin) and linseed oil.

It can be used both inside or outside, and on raw or sealed wood.

It really works, is absolutely natural and even has a good fragrance.

If you have an opportunity to be at the Bryanston Organic Market, please ask the "knife making man" what product he uses as a sealer and polisher on his masterpieces' handles.

FOLLOW UP ON NEW PRODUCTS

The HONEY & NUTS product MACADAMIA & RAW COCOA is as good and if not better than its ingredients imply.

The bitterness of the cocoa balances the sweetness of the other

ingredients MACADAMIA AND HONEY.

COCOA also adds a huge amount of highly desirable flavanoids that have great antioxidant properties.

FEEDBACK THANKS

All feedback on these newsletters are welcome.

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

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