

## PEST AND DISEASE CONTROL

# HEALTHY HIVES OF NELSON

*Nigel Costley*

“Anyone can get AFB,” began Andrew Lane’s presentation to the Nelson Beekeepers Club in November of last season. He went on to describe the alarming incidence of AFB found in Nelson city during that spring. Running 130 widely dispersed rental hives, Andrew’s set up is particularly vulnerable to AFB. What to do?

Andrew suggested that the club offer to inspect beehives for those who aren’t AFB savvy, with a view to mopping up these outbreaks early. Something along the lines of ‘diseaseathons’ that were practiced years ago.

Andrew’s idea struck a chord. Club vice-president Jason Smith agreed. “Getting a beehive can be like being given a puppy. When the novelty wears off you’re not quite sure what to do with it,” he says.

Within a couple of weeks, a small group within the club was formed to make it happen. Although AFB was the initial prompt, over-emphasising this could be off-putting: “Hi there, how about we come around and burn your hive?” Much better to emphasise the positive, including a complete hive check where issues such as varroa, honey stores, and queen status could also be covered. The Healthy Hive Project was born.

Next, a snappy press release:

All beekeepers know that caring for bees can be a tricky business, and sometimes a little help can go a long way. The Nelson Beekeepers Club is running a Healthy Hive Check programme that offers beekeepers the chance to have their hives inspected. This will be free of charge and completed by a team of experienced beekeepers. This is open to anyone that has a beehive in the Nelson–Tasman Region.

Anyone wanting their hive inspected could register by filling in a simple form on the club’s website, easily done courtesy of the club’s IT man Shaun Heath. Then the AFB Management Agency e-mailed the inspection offer to all registered beekeepers in the district. This immediately brought in 18 registrations. The local Apiculture New Zealand Hub also circulated the notice through their network. We were off to a good start.

The local community papers jumped at the story—two of them putting it on their front page. There were also a series of ads on commercial radio; this was the most expensive aspect of the project and we are



*Cath Moisan, secretary of the Nelson Beekeepers Club. Photo courtesy of the Waimea Weekly.*

dubious as to how effective it was. Most of the sponsorship money went on radio.

Using a map and Excel spreadsheet, club secretary Catherine Moisan sorted the apiaries by location. Collating the expressions of interest was the most time-consuming aspect of the project, said Cath.

An extensive lead-in time was required so with the inspections scheduled for the end of April, we wanted our PR out by the end of March.

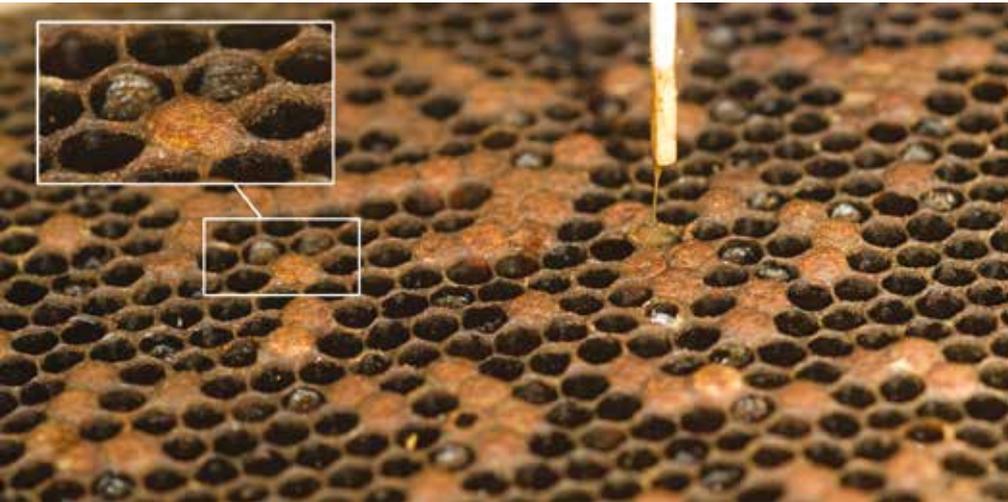
## Hive checkers answer the call

On club night in early March 2019, after AP2 Norbert Klose gave a presentation on hygiene protocol between apiaries, a call was put out for hive checkers. We ended up with 20 checkers, buddied up in pairs between old hands (over 10 years’ experience) with new hands (a couple of seasons’ experience). All had their DECAs. This was followed up by a field day under tutor Nigel Costley where apiary protocol was clearly spelt out. Each team of checkers was allocated bleach, wooden skewers for probing suspect larvae, and disposable rubber gloves. We were prepped for action.

We ended up with 30 registrations; i.e., beekeepers who wanted their hives inspected (inspectees). One apiary had 26 hives, but the vast majority had only a couple of hives. Each pair of checkers was allocated around three apiaries—mostly only a couple of hours’ work, with travel minimised by allocation by region. Each team was given a folder with the whole inspection schedule, their allocation highlighted and a hive inspection form to be left with the inspectee. The folder also included the contact details of the inspectees, and any useful information such as difficult-to-find sites or hazards.

While the last weekend in April was targeted as inspection time, it was left up to the checkers and the inspectees to find a date and time that was mutually agreeable. Most of the inspectees wanted to be present during the inspection—all were keen to do the right thing and appreciated the guidance. Some inspectees were quite experienced, others were complete beginners. Many questions and useful discussions ensued.

A brief apiary report was left with the inspectee.



American Foulbrood symptoms: Ropey dead larvae and black scale. Photo: Michael E Wilson, provided courtesy of Bee Informed Partnership, Inc.

### Results

Seventy-seven hives were inspected in registered apiaries. Thirty nine had signs of parasitic mite syndrome (PMS), mostly queenright, and two cases of AFB were confirmed. Cath followed this up to ensure the beekeepers did the right thing (working around a fire ban), and then she confirmed with the AFB Management Agency. And yes, they had been notified within seven days.

It was obviously demoralising for those who lost their hives, but Cath remarked that their attitude was commendable. "They learned to do the right thing and realised it was just their bad luck to be in an AFB-prone area," said Cath.

The project also served to broaden the experience of the hive checkers and encourage them to expand their sphere of beekeeping. "It was an awesome experience for these guys," said Cath.

### Problems

One of the participants asked if a checker would sign off their Certificate of Inspection (COI)—not an expectation to be encouraged. After all, we want them to get their own DECA, as it comes with some core basic skills. Some checkers were happy to do some follow-up support/mentoring. It was totally up to the individual checker how far to take this.

Overall it was a very successful exercise in utilising the considerable expertise of the club as a valuable community resource.

What would we do differently when, and if, we do it again? We would include a question on the registration form asking how beekeepers heard about the scheme to better target further PR. "Overall, I think we had a pretty good formula," said Jason. We could try to reach that difficult group—the unregistered. That would be a good trick.



Inspecting a hive. Photo: Murray Reid. (File photo.)

### POEM



## A BEEKEEPER'S WINTER TALE

*Celso Roger Baldo*

Here come again the cold, cold evenings  
A chilly one in the winter mornings  
I'm tucked up in my thick woollen clothes  
A farming All Blacks beanie as my hood.

Today is a planned apiary visit  
It was a scheduled to-do on my list  
To go and check our dear little bees  
To be ready for this cold winter breeze.

Armed with my usual beekeeping gears  
A smoker, hive tool and my bee suit  
Sugar syrup in case I need to feed  
A fogger for mites to drop them dead.

A little say hi upon opening the lids  
I saw our bees doing good deeds  
A smooth puffer from my tiny smoker  
Will make the bees a little bit calmer.

In winter some bees tend to hibernate  
But *Apis mellifera* remain active  
Feed them with pollen patty for nutrients  
As well as honey and syrup as supplements.

Old crappy frames and boxes were changed  
Hive entrances were weed whacked and cleaned  
Pallets strapped and free from the stocks  
Farmer's thumbs up, gates are now locked.

I'm quite happy with what I did see  
All the bees are still full of energy  
To heat the hive and protect their queenie  
I left with a smile, knowing our bees are  
winter ready.

## Poetry in the Apiary ##  
By Celso Roger Baldo

June 2019, Cambridge, NZ