

BeeMail

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Send your news to: beemail@bee-craft.com

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Asian bees pose Varroa threat...

AUSTRALIAN authorities are concerned by the discovery of two swarms of Asian bees in **Queensland**.

Searches are being carried out to see if the latest colony is linked to a swarm found in August and if there are others between the two sites.

It is feared the bees could bring varroa and *Nosema ceranae* to Australia, which has so far remained free of the pest.

...but bees fight back against beetles

RESEARCHERS in Australia say they have found a species of stingless bee that attacks invading pests such as small hive beetle (SHB) and mummifies them.

Using a CT scanner to observe hive behaviour the team, headed by Dr Mark Greco, found that the *Trigona carbonaria* bees mob the interloper, biting at its legs and forcing it to adopt what the scientists call a 'turtle posture', tucking in its heads and legs. Thus immobilised, the bees can mummify the beetle by coating it in resin, wax and mud.

It is not known if this defensive behaviour is an old trick or was developed by the bees to deal with the relatively new threat (SHB is thought to have been introduced to Australia during the 2000 Olympics). But this phenomenon has also been noticed in honey bee colonies.

As reported in *BeeMail* 20, American beekeeper Norris Childs of Philadelphia observed mummified beetles in his colonies. See his letter on page 5 of the digital edition of *Bee Culture*.

It should be remembered, however, that SHB is still a significant threat, so don't just rely on feisty bees to deal with the problem.

US: Pesticide banned 'on technicality'

A JUDGE in the US has pulled the plug on a chemical insecticide after protests from environmental groups about its possible effects of honey bees.

Spirotetramat, sold under various names including *Movento*, was approved for use in the US in 2008, but in December District Court Judge Denise Cote ordered the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to withdraw its approval for the chemical, which inhibits cell reproduction in insects.

The ruling means the insecticide will be illegal in the US from January 15, and has been welcomed by several campaign groups concerned about pesticide links to Colony Collapse Disorder.

"This decision pulls a potentially dangerous insecticide from the market so that it can be evaluated. There are lower-risk alternatives on the market," said Aaron Colangelo, an attorney for the New York-based Natural Resources Defense Council, which sued the EPA along with the Xerces Society, a wildlife conservation group from Portland, Oregon.

Both Bayer CropScience and the EPA have

Spirotetramat products launched in UK this spring

60 days to appeal the decision, but the EPA said it was merely "reviewing the situation".

Bayer was quick to point out, however, that the decision was based on procedural irregularities at the EPA, rather than on the performance of the product itself, which spokesman Jack Boyne said was "excellent" in regard to bee safety. The chemical is cleared for use in several nations, including much of Europe, Australia and Canada.

Last week the company held urgent talks with the British Beekeepers' Association to discuss spirotetramat ahead of Bayer's intended announcement this week of the launch of products containing the chemical on the UK market in May.

A BBKA spokesman said they were satisfied that spirotetramat posed minimal risk to bees.

Indeed, the toxicity of spirotetramat to honey bees is said to be so low that products containing the active substance will not be required to carry any kind of labelling or restrictions concerning honey bees.

"The court case had nothing to do with the properties of the compound", the spokesman told *BeeMail*. "Basically the judge ruled that there had been no public comment carried out due to a procedural mistake by the US EPA in carrying out the authorisation process."

The EPA approved spirotetramat in 2008 for use on hundreds of crops, including apples, pears, peaches, oranges, tomatoes, grapes, strawberries, almonds and spinach.

Judge Cote criticised the agency for not properly publicising its review of the product or seeking comments about its award of a licence for use.

"The EPA utterly failed to comply with these procedural requirements and has offered no explanation whatsoever for these shortcomings," Cote wrote.

Mr Colangelo added: "The EPA admitted to approving the pesticide illegally, but argued that its violations of the law should have no consequences."

Honey sales fall

PREDICTIONS of bare supermarket shelves may have been exaggerated, but it seems price rises caused by honey shortages have caused a drop in UK sales for the first time in six years.

Figures first published in *The Grocer* magazine revealed sales in the 12 months to October 2009 were down 5.4 per cent, while prices rose by almost 18 per cent.

Polish beekeeper not dead

A PLEA by a widow for her husband's necklace saved his life... just as his coffin was about to be sealed.

As the undertaker removed the necklace he felt a faint pulse in the 'dead' man's neck.

Josef Guzy, 76, of Katowice, had been pronounced dead after collapsing while visiting his bees. Some reports suggested his collapse was caused by a sting.

After his miraculous recovery Mr Guzy said: "The undertaker saved my life. The first thing I did when I got out of hospital was take him a pot of honey."

CCD: reports vary

ALTHOUGH it is too early to tell the full effects of winter losses, cases of Colony Collapse Disorder in the US have been varied, according to one report.

While some bee producers have reported 'tremendous' losses of up to 80 percent it seems there is some confidence that the damage nationwide has not been as severe as in recent years.

However, hopes of a better beekeeping year were dashed by drought conditions in California that caused forest fires and made 2009 the lowest honey-producing year ever, according to the California Farm Bureau Federation.

A recent survey by the Apiary Inspectors of America found that 75 percent of respondents had lost some bees for various reasons, but only 25 percent thought the reason was CCD, said Eric Mussen, apiculturist at the University of California Cooperative Extension.

But beekeeper Shannon Wooten said the full effects would not be known for a couple of months. "The losses now are worth noting, because it's early and it's already happening."

Shrill warning

VOTES are needed to help the Bumblebee Conservation Trust win a €30,000 (£26,000) prize to set up a wildflower site in Pembrokeshire, aimed at preserving the Shrill Carder Bee. Click [here](#) for details.

One likely supporter is Green Party London Assembly member **Jenny Jones**, who recently had a tattoo of the insect.

Honey, I blew up the plane

BOTTLES filled with amber liquid sparked a security alert at **Bakersfield Airport**, California, but turned out to be honey.

FBI officials admit the honey contained no drugs or explosive element, but claim a swab of the bag containing the bottles had tested positive for TNT.

Happy landings in Llandod

THE Welsh Assembly Government's third annual **beekeepers' conference** takes place on Tuesday February 16 in Llandrindod Wells, Powys.

Details: Amy Byrne on 01267 245007.

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