

BeeMail

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

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A sting in time saves mind

BEE venom has long been thought to help against **arthritic** swelling, and even offer a 'cure' for **cancer** (*BeeMail* 19, September 2009). Now scientists claim it can improve our brain function.

A peptide toxin in bee venom called apamin can block certain central nervous system channels. Apamin can make nerves in the brain hyper-excitable, causing convulsions and respiratory paralysis, but it can also lead to improved learning and memory.

Scientists have been aware for a while that certain bug venoms were effective in treating brain disorders like **MS** but now researchers at the **University of Bristol** say they have learned how to identify when the

apamin binds to particular channels in the brain. This may help to develop medications that can mimic what apamin does in the body.

"Drug design depends on knowing the target," Professor Neil Marrion of the University of Bristol's Physiology and Pharmacology department, said. "Our findings provide a new approach to designing a therapeutic agent that could help with the treatment of a number of conditions."

● Arthritis sufferers may soon be able to take their bee-sting medicine in the most delightful way, with no spoonful of sugar required.

Nelson Honey of New Zealand promises painless results with 'bee sting honey', selling 13 million jars in the past decade. Now the firm has applied for a licence to export the honey to Britain.

● 'Medihoney' is now used in wound dressings in the US.

Call to ban neonicotinoids renewed

Environmental groups have repeated calls to end the use of neonicotinoid pesticides, after a study linked them to a decline in bee populations.

The **report**, in the online journal *Toxicology*, says the effects of two particular neonicotinoid pesticides, imidacloprid and thiacloprid, have previously been underestimated and may explain the decline in bee populations.

'The acceptable limits are based mainly on short-term tests', said study author Dr Henk Tennekes, a consultant toxicologist from Zutphen in the Netherlands. 'If long-term studies were to be carried out, far lower

'We will not hesitate' ...but not yet - Defra

concentrations may turn out to be hazardous. Minute quantities of imidacloprid may induce bee decline in the long run.'

Groups including The Soil Association and Buglife have welcomed the report, which expands on Dr Tennekes' earlier work on pesticides leaching into soil and the water table (see *BeeMail* 18, August 2009).

Dutch water boards detected 93 agricultural chemicals in soil and groundwater samples, 24 of which were over permitted limits. Imidacloprid was found at levels of up to 320 microgrammes per litre. The European Plant Protection Products Directive (91/414/EEC) requires minimal impact on the aquatic and

terrestrial environment and that the average concentration of an active substance does not exceed 0.1 microgram per litre.

The industry has been quick to defend the use of pesticides, pointing to greater yields from protected crops and the lower direct risk to wildlife posed by systemic seed-coating systems rather than conventional spraying.

The current (August) issue of *BBKA News* includes a defence of neonicotinoid pesticides by Julian Little, of Bayer CropScience Ltd.

Despite bans in several countries, Imidacloprid is still the most widely used insecticide in the world, with sales in 2009 of €606 million (£502 million).

A spokesman for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) said the UK had no plans to restrict or prohibit the use of neonicotinoids, but conceded: 'This research highlights a need for more data on long-term risks to bee health. We have already been considering this and pesticide companies will soon need to provide this data under new EU rules.'

'We will keep this area under review and will not hesitate to act if there is any evidence of an unacceptable risk to bees.'

Carder bee on council site

A colony of rare **Brown Carder Bees** has been discovered on an urban site in Herefordshire.

The bees, whose numbers have been dwindling, are usually restricted to the south coast. They were discovered by local enthusiast Andrew Nixon.

Stings in the tales

Thanks to *BeeMail* reader Mike Costello, who lives in Italy's Apennine mountains, for this photo of a giant swarm.

'It was so big at first I thought I'd found a rare breed of European gorilla', Mike said.



Meanwhile, Britain's biggest **wasp nest** has been found in a Southampton pub.

Oxfam's useful bucket

Oxfam charity shops have been selling 'Really Useful' buckets for £6.99 that could be a boon to amateur beekeepers.

The 14-litre food-grade lidded buckets have a water tap on the side which, while not as fast as the standard valve and, due to its shape, positioned about 2in higher than ideal, make decanting runny honey a lot easier than using a ladle!

Honey plant destroyed

Investigators are examining the cause of a fire that destroyed the 10,000-square-foot **Chaparral Honey** factory in San Diego county, California on August 6.

Government help

SCOTLAND's Environment Secretary Richard Lochhead has announced a **10-year plan** to help bees after honey bee populations dropped by a third in the winter of 2008-9.

Mr Lochhead said that Scotland was 'committed to supporting the beekeeping community' that helps pollinate the country's £68-million soft fruit industry.

A bid was approved for £183,000 for a sterilisation plant for equipment in Perthshire, where 60 per cent of Scotland's honey is produced, and research will be carried out at Dundee University into the impact of pesticides.

● IRELAND's government has announced a €300,000 (£250,000) research **programme** aimed at finding new treatments for the varroa mite and to discover the extent of the losses, as the parasite develops resistance to commonly used miticide strips Bayvarol and Apistan.

Bees 'bounce back'

CANADIAN beekeepers are keeping their fingers crossed as colony numbers improved this year after a disastrous 2009.

A mild winter and early spring saw a **marked increase** in survival rates.

Some beekeepers have also praised the government for speedily approving a new miticide to combat *Varroa destructor* as the pest gains immunity to existing treatments.

Channel Islands brace for foul brood

AMERICAN foulbrood (AFB) has been found in two hives on the island of Jersey, triggering alerts throughout the **Channel Islands**.

Beekeepers in Guernsey have been instructed not to import bees or equipment, in an attempt to keep the disease off the island.

It is illegal to import second-hand beekeeping equipment to Guernsey, which last suffered an outbreak of AFB about 40 years ago.

Beekeepers on the island are advised to join **Guernsey Beekeepers' Association** to register and for advice or help with inspections.

And finally...

If the kids are bored over the school holidays I shall be presenting a discussion of **The Law of the Beehive** at Science Oxford Live on Thursday, August 12.

Start 7.30pm at the venue in St Clements, Oxford. The lecture will be webcast. Tickets are £3 or £10 for a family of up to 5.

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