

January 2013
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PO Box 1115, Aitkenvale, Q4814

Special points of interest:

- Visit our new website at www.beesnorth.org
- If anyone has excess wax to sell, or wants to combine postage to reduce freight costs? Please contact Frana McKinstry
- A reminder about bee club polo shirts. These are available from Frana (ph 0413 765192)

Next meeting:

Sunday 20 January, 2013, 14:00 at Kirsty Sugden's place, 183 Ireland St, Oonoonba. See map on Page 3

Newsletter of the Townsville and District Beekeepers Association



Photo: Joel Mackay

www.beesnorth.org

Editorial

A happy New Year to you all! I hope your Christmas was joyful, relaxing, filled with happiness and spent in great company! I hope you have all recovered from the Christmas cheer and holidays and ready to get stuck into another bee year?

It seems a long time between meetings and newsletters, having missed the December meeting. Despite the long break this newsletter is a little rushed as I only got back from holidays a few days ago.

I must be turning into a bee-tragic as the first item on the agenda (even before unpacking from the trip) was to open the bee hive and see how they were doing. Thankfully all was well and I even managed to get a frame or two of honey off. My overall impression however is that the honey flow this year is not as good last year just before the rain. I'd love to hear to hear how things have been going at your end?

Thanks again to the wonderful people who contributed to this newsletter and for making my life so much easier - this month: Frana, Mannie, Neil and Leonie (through a friend).

Ray Berkelmans



A honey bee working almond blossom in Capay Valley, California, USA.

A comment on recent bee news!

On 22 November 2012, the Australian Government's Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry issued this advice: "DAFF Biosecurity officers located 10 live and dead *Apis cerana* (Asian honey bee) on the decks of a bulk fuel carrier first ported at Kurnell (Sydney) on Wednesday 21 November 2012. The vessel had sailed from Singapore. A single *Varroa* mite was found on one of these bees, with subsequent identification confirming the mite to be *Varroa jacobsoni* and **NOT** *Varroa destructor*."

Further inspection of the vessel identified a swarm of some 2000 bees located on one of

the ship's cranes. A professional pest controller was able to destroy all bees without the swarm absconding. Dead bees from this swarm have been sent for further diagnostic work.

Dissection of the first 10 bees collected has revealed no tracheal mites present."

This provoked the following comment from one of our members:

"This begs the question of how do they not get noticed on a trip of that length. I believe that protocols should be in place, that owners representatives should sign off on biosecurity before a pilot is aboard, this should be

done with ridiculously high penalties for fault . This would make the shipping companies do a proper job: Lets say a first offense of confiscation of all shipping owned by all shareholders. That might be a bit over the top but it might shake AQIS (Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service) from their "it will happen anyway" back to

"Fortress Australia first and always" and it might make owners more aware of their responsibility as at present they can carve up the Barrier Reef with quite small penalties, inconsequential really, when the savings of a risk even if it goes wrong are so great. If they thumb their nose at the Reef then we have no hope.

Neal E

Minutes of the last Meeting

Townsville and District Beekeepers Association meeting 18-11-12.

No formal minutes were taken at the meeting.

Two scientists from Biosecurity Queensland attended the meeting, Ana and Brenda. They spoke about the history and the future of *Apis cerana*, the Asian honey bee, in Queensland for over an hour and a half. They made themselves available to talk with members after the meeting and many took the opportunity to do so over afternoon tea and coffee.

One of the points they made was not to believe the scare-mongering about *Apis cerana* outcompeting the European honey bee, *Apis mellifera*. Not sure why they seemed to focus on this. They also claimed that *A. cerana* were probably more docile than *A. mellifera*. This is contrary to what we have been told and lead to believe for all these years.

They presented a slide show which can be seen on their work website and Rob and Ray will converse and hopefully have a link from the Beesnorth Website to it. (Ed: not yet, but hopefully soon!)

Dennis Anderson has retired from the industry which will be another sad loss along with Peter Warhust. Members were handed information sheets to digest over time.

The next meeting will be held at Kirsty Sugden's place at 183 Ireland Street, Oonoonba on the 3rd Sunday in January.

If you have interesting bee stuff, please email Grant or Ray B. so it can be shared with other members.

Grant

Email, grantwhiteford4@optusnet.com.au.

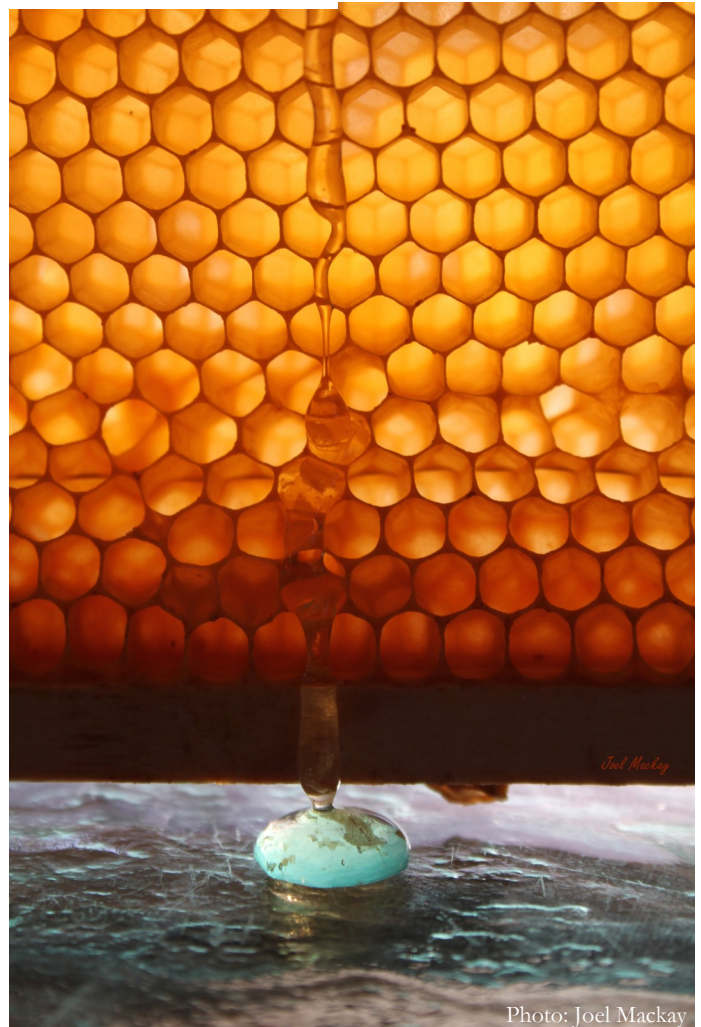


Photo: Joel Mackay

Joel Mackay's images have been gracing the front page of the Australian Beekeeper magazine recently. Here is another one of his stunning images.

Hive placement opportunities

There are quite a few people interested in bees but are not ready themselves to manage a beehive. However, they are often willing to make their place available for someone to place one or more hives at their place. This month we have two expressions of interest. If you are running short on space for hives at your place, please consider these offers:

1. Debbie Nolan (ph 0427 454035). She would like to

have a hive or two on her property if anyone interested. She lives on a few acres at Oak Valley.

2. Dane Amooore (dane.amooore@hotmail.com or contact Ray B on 0427 473239 to get a message to him).

Are any members looking for a friendly area to house some of their bees? We have a property on the Cape Cleveland Road on the way to AIMS and would be interested in accommodating some hives if required.

Turbo-charged bees

Hive productivity in the Townville suburbs is normally pretty steady: no big honey flows, but no long lulls in production either. There is always something in flower and, averaged over a year, my impression is that suburban productivity is probably higher than what our country folk are getting.

So, how long does it take for a frame of new foundation to be drawn in the suburbs? Ordinarily, my experience is something in the order of 4 - 8 weeks, depending on conditions. However, as I discovered recently, there are occasions when things can happen rather fast!

In early November, Mike James and I caught a large swarm in my back yard from one of my hives. Having sized up the swarm, Mike suggested I give them a full box of 10 foundation frames to start with (at least double what I was about to offer them!).

From day 1, activity in the new nuc was huge. For the first few days bees undertook "orientation flights" in large numbers and for hours. My guess is that they preferred to re-swarm but the queen excluder on the base prevented a certain important member from getting out. After a few days the orientation flights settled down and the bees began to forage. Arrivals at any time of the day were well over 100 per minute, even at 7am! After 9 days, I could not hold my curiosity: I had to open up to see how they were doing. To my surprise all 10 frames were completely drawn on both sides! The majority of frames even had uncapped brood. I also found handfuls of bees clustered in the lid and decided that hive was populous enough for a super.

Lacking any spare stickies, I gave them 10 new foundation frames upstairs – generally a no-no! I spent the next two days worrying about how much work I was giving them and looking for signs of despondency. Activity levels however were unchanged with bee traffic at the entrance rivalling a

six-lane motorway at peak-hour! Nevertheless, I now had some stickies on hand and decided to swap out the foundation frames for these, lest there was a lag in reaction or something. So, on day 11, I opened up the hive again, this time with new member Craig Anderson, and to our amazement, almost all frames had been drawn out, or at least were well on the way to being drawn out! Some frames even contained uncapped honey! Moreover, in the intervening two days, over 70% of the area of the brood frames were now capped! Either these bees are turbo-charged or they are on speed!

I realise this phenomenon is all about the bees being in swarming mode and eager to make their new home. However, I've had quite a few swarms before and not seen this level of activity. Perhaps it is a combination of the size of the swarm and the time of year?

Ray



Photo: Craig Anderson

Two days after supering, almost all foundation frames were fully drawn out or well on the way!

*Next meeting: Sunday 20 January 14:00,
183 Ireland St, Oonoomba <http://goo.gl/maps/TorsZ>*



Photo: Craig Anderson

After 9 days, all 10 frames in the brood box were drawn out and after 11 days were 70% covered in capped brood

Beekeeping in the Victorian mallee country

Hi All, happy New Year. I have been asked for a report about Honey prospects and so decided to send it to Geelong Beekeeping Club Inc members as well. At present we are seeing the combination of weather events that has resulted in very difficult times for beekeepers. Last years cool wet summer and a very wet winter resulted in the ground being saturated, and since September it has forgotten how to rain resulting in a very dry top soil and therefore almost no ground flora. The Eucalypts have their roots in the moisture down deeper in the ground and are growing rampantly and not worrying about flowering to set seed for the future. I expect the dry surface soil will result in the trees making buds for next year, but so far many trees seem to have only grown new wood. This has resulted in the worst beekeeping conditions for 25 years or more. The Mallee looked to be the exception but only 3 to 6 inches of rain through the winter and nothing since August has resulted in extremely dry conditions and bees struggling to survive despite good flowering. I have been fortunate to have gathered honey from my area in the Mallee but it is the exception. I am worried about the 10 days of over 40 degrees heatwave forecast for the Mallee, I will go up and see how the bees are coping and supply water. I possibly may be able to shift some out to the south where we will only have a couple of 40 degree days and more 30 + days BUT the risk of fire is greater. Be careful where you have your bees in long grass etc as fire risk is extreme this season. The Black Box yielded briefly but the heat cooked the flowers. My friend was relieved to find a fire at Yandoit missed his uninsured hives by 200 meters, thanks to the helicopter water bombers this fire in hilly country was contained to 200 hectare's. In central Victoria beekeepers have resorted to buying sugar from Bob McDonald

and making sugar syrup and feeding the bees in the open. The bees are able to utilize the small amounts of pollen from the Red Gum and Flatweed to make brood and keep the bees breeding. Around Geelong conditions are very variable from good to starving and in some cases not very far from each area. The problem seems to be the pollen eating beetles (long Green beetles) that have completely taken over the flowers, the bees will not go anywhere near the flowers after the beetles leave their stink on them. I drove past trees at Werribee yesterday and the beetles hung in the trees as black swarms completely covering the Bushy Sugar Gum flowers. Raising queen cells has been difficult and the constant cool south winds have slowed the queens mating flights, although surprising to see the queens have made good nucs although slowly. Today I intend to look at more bees locally to find where they are doing better and place some sheets over the hive to break the heat. I find if you can place an extra lid or even a roof of corrugated iron on the lid the bees cope much better from the direct sun. I find the heat is worst when the nights are hot and the bees do not get relief from a cool change. This why the bees inland suffer and will eat their brood for moisture. Ideally we could place all our bees in the suburbs of Geelong where the Brush Box, Red Flowering Gum, Melaleuca Summer snow, Moonah, Bushy Sugar Gum and garden plants keep the bees working busily. The Blanketweed with its strong bitter honey is flowering and yielding. Patches of Lucerne that have not been cut are yielding nectar and it does better on the hot days. At Bendigo we are waiting for the Kamarooka Mallee to commence flowering, some trees have started but the numbers of hives are too great with loads of 500 hives only surviving as there is not enough nectar yet for a surplus. The early flowering Ironbark has budding and hopefully the trees will not shed them during the forth coming heat, this tree is renowned for dropping buds. Red Stringybark is budded in the North East but I am told does not look as good now. Little Red Mallee is heavily budded and desperately needs a drink, Dumosa Mallee also has budding. The Grampians have become very dry and unlikely to produce Teatree honey unless a thunderstorm comes through, the fire risk in the Grampians is possibly worse now than before the big fires 6 years ago as the wattles are a dense thicket. Bees will breed there on the Stringybark and wildflowers. Grey Box is patchy , but some areas will produce honey. If we could get some rain then the position would change for the better, but as it stands at present next year looks like the big one. I have heard of a Victoria beekeeper that has shifted his bees to Charleville Queensland which is 3 days travelling north from Victoria. At present we are hoping the Tall Sugar Gum will yield but budding is very poor.

Regards John

(Pro beekeeper and friend of Leonie D)



A combination of a dry topsoil and moisture deeper underground has resulted in one of the worst conditions for beekeeping in 25 years.

Do bees sleep?

I've often wondered about whether or not bees work 24/7, or if they take snooze breaks. We've noticed when standing next to the hive at night we can still hear buzzing so they are definitely working night shift. Given that the average bee only lives for about six weeks, and can cover hundreds of kilometers as a field worker, she really would need to take a break occasionally.

A quick look on the web came up with some interesting information. It seems that bees do sleep, there are a number of photos of bees curled up inside flowers or on plant stems, away from the hive where they might be spotted having a nana nap. Even more interesting are the ones that sneak a quick snooze on the job – a bee will put herself head down into a honeycomb cell and stay motionless for up to twenty minutes! Reminds me of some office workers in front of their computers.

According to Jürgen Tautz in his book *The Buzz About Bees*, forager bees enter a pronounced state of sleep—largely at night and in the hive. However, sometimes they sleep outside the hive as well. In addition, beekeepers and bee photographers the world over have reported seeing bees asleep in flowers. The bees may remain stationary for hours, only to fly away when disturbed.

Apparently, snoozing bees are easy to spot because their antennae droop and the legs are folded beneath the body. From one contributor – “I have observed bees and photographed them sleeping in flowers in my backyard. At first I thought it might be an intoxicating element of the plant and perhaps the bees were all dead. I touched one to check and the bee reacted as a person sleeping. The bee was disturbed by the touch, moved about, re-adjusted his position and seemed to go back to sleep. There were well over a dozen bees in this bed of flowers when this observation was made.”



Zoned out - a bee seemingly having a little nana-nap on a twig.

As far back as 1806, François Huber noted the following in his book “New Observations on the Natural History Of Bees”

“When the workers penetrate the cells, and remain fifteen or twenty minutes motionless, I have reason to believe, it is to repose from their



A sleeping bee in a petal. When disturbed it readily wakes up.

labours. My observations on the subject seem correct. You know, Sir, that a kind of irregular shaped cells, are frequently constructed on the panes of the hive. These, being glass on one side, are exceedingly convenient to the observer, since all that passes within is exposed. I have often seen bees enter these cells when nothing could attract them. The cells contained neither eggs nor honey, nor did they need further completion. Therefore the workers repaired thither only to enjoy some moments of repose. Indeed, they were fifteen or twenty minutes so perfectly motionless, that had not the dilation of the rings, shewed their respiration, we might have concluded them dead. The queen also sometimes penetrates the cells of the males, and continues very long motionless in them. Her position prevents the bees from paying their full homage to her, yet even then the workers do not fail to form a circle around her and brush the part of her belly that remains exposed.”

So it seems that even the Queen bee sleeps. Of course, this begs the question, if bees sleep, do they dream? I dreamed that a huge white ape ripped the roof off my house, filled it with smoke and then rearranged all the furniture . . .

Sounds more like a nightmare to me.

Frana

Bee stings: What everyone needs to know!

Almost all available advice about stings is sensational or emphasises allergies. Very little of that advice admits that bee stings are pretty insignificant most of the time, causing little more than some excitement and temporary minor pain, or that some people actually seek out bee stings for their beneficial effects.

Here is a bee-keeper's personal perspective. Please read the disclaimer below.

The normal reaction to a bee sting is a bit of temporary pain at the location of the sting, some itching and some swelling. Some parts of the body are more sensitive than others and swelling is most noticeable on the face.

Bee stings are a normal part of life in the country and a normal part of working with bees. Many people enjoy bees and consider the occasional sting to be the price we pay for the pleasure of their company, for having them pollinate our food crops and for providing us with honey.

Bee stings are harmless for most people. Although stings are sometimes painful, they can also be beneficial; bee stings are sometimes deliberately administered in large numbers to treat diseases such as MS and arthritis with good results.

Bees and wasps and hornets are different in the way they sting and the venom they carry. Hornets and wasps do not leave a stinger behind. Bees usually leave a visible stinger in the wound and it should be removed by brushing or scraping it off as soon as possible to minimise the amount of venom received.

Removing the stinger as quickly as possible reduces the amount of the venom injected and reduces the effects. Contrary to what is often taught, it has been recently proven (<http://bees.ucr.edu/stings.html>) that it does not matter how the stinger is removed. Whether the stinger is scraped off or just brushed off, speed is the most important factor in minimising the effects of a sting. The extra time it takes to carefully scrape the stinger off, instead of simply brushing it off, may actually result in more venom being injected than if the stinger is casually brushed away with a finger.

Stay calm. Most of the ill effects from normal stinging incidents come from panic in the person being stung and bystanders. Panic and anxiety multiplies the pain, and can result in serious secondary accidents. Panic by the person stung or those around him/her can produce a systemic reaction in itself.

As far as anyone can know, the amount of pain experienced after a sting is pretty much the same for everyone, but the amount of itching and swelling depends on the person being stung and how often the person has been stung in the past. The actual puncture point where the stinger penetrated the skin sometimes festers a little bit and a small pimple on the site is not unusual. This clears up by itself and is normally no cause for concern.

Although many people make a huge fuss about being stung

and recommend many remedies, the simple truth is that the less attention that is paid to a sting, the less painful it is. Preoccupation with the sting only makes the problem worse. People accustomed to working with bees do not normally do anything except brush or scratch off the stinger, unless the sting is in a sensitive area such as near the eye or elsewhere on the face. If it is, special attention is taken to ensure the stinger is out.

Some parts of the body are more sensitive to stings and each part will respond differently. The areas near the eyes and lips are particularly prone to swelling, sometimes result in a most comical distortion of the person's appearance. For students working with bee-keepers, this usually happens the day before the Prom. A sting in the eyeball is not to be desired, but we did have one fellow stung dead centre with no lasting effect -- or pain for that matter. We rushed him to the doctor and the doctor took a look. He didn't know exactly what to do either -- other than to extract the remains of the stinger. Anyhow, nothing came of it. A sting to the tip of the nose or the ears can bring genuine, heartfelt tears to the eyes of even an experienced bee-keeper. Pain from stings on fatty areas of the body can inspire amazing language from the victim. Stings in bony points like wrists and ankles can cause some temporary aching, much like arthritis, and as for more private areas, well, the swelling is not quite what some might hope for... Sorry!

Some bee-keepers consider stings to be huge joke, but stings should be taken with some seriousness, if at all possible.

Immunity to Bee Stings

Seasoned bee-keepers experience virtually no reaction to stings and generally ignore occasional stings in their daily work. Bee-keepers still feel the sting the same as anyone else, but since they are not worried about stings, the sensation is soon forgotten. Normally good bee-keepers wear a veil to prevent stings to the face, but work with bare hands and receive occasional stings to the wrists and hands.

People who have never been stung by a bee often have no itching or swelling at first. After a number of stings most people begin to itch more and swell at the location of the sting. Sometimes the swelling can be quite extreme (and comical if it occurs on the face), however swelling is a normal reaction in someone who is developing immunity, and only lasts until immunity is developed.

Immunity to bee stings builds up fairly quickly in most people. After several weeks of occasional stings, the reactions diminish, itching is no longer a problem, and swelling is much reduced.

Immunity can fade over periods of time without stings such as over winter. Some sensitivity is not uncommon for the first few stings after such a period, even for bee-keepers with immunity.

Allergy to Bee Stings

Severe reactions are very rare and although everyone should be aware of the possibility, a bee sting for most normal people is a minor inconvenience and is best ignored and forgotten as quickly as possible.

True allergy to bee stings-- as to practically any substance -- can occur. As with any allergy, degree of allergy can vary from

mild to life-threatening. People with bee allergies often get over them spontaneously or by seeking treatment from an allergist who specialises in bee stings.

Family members of bee-keepers and those who work with bee products are at much higher risk of developing a bee sting allergy than members of the general public, due to low-level exposure to dusts from bees. For such individuals, getting stung regularly -- once a month? -- is advisable to prevent developing sensitivity.

Reaction to stings can vary in an individual, and a person who has no reaction on one occasion may respond differently at later time. A serious reaction on one occasion does not guarantee that subsequent stings will cause a crisis.

Some drugs can cause increased sensitivity to stings. Drugs with names ending in 'phen' are anecdotally implicated.

Doctors and Bee Stings

Most general practitioners know very little more than the average person on the street about bee sting allergy, but they can definitely save a life in a crisis. If a crisis situation is suspected no time should be wasted. Call **000** and get to a hospital as quickly as possible. Although most such scares are false alarms, if there is a real anaphylactic reaction, death can occur in a matter of minutes.

It is a generally a waste of time and money to consult a doctor unless a potential life-threatening reaction is suspected, but if there are symptoms besides swelling, itching and minor rash then consulting a doctor may be advisable. Nonetheless, any advice received from anyone but a specialist should be examined with the understanding that many doctors will play it safe and advise staying away from bees, no matter how low the risk, since most people do not see any point in having anything to do with insects anyhow.

Reactions that are cause for concern and for which *immediate* medical assistance should be sought are any that cause difficulty breathing, either due to a systemic reaction or swelling of the airways where the reaction to the sting occurs elsewhere on the body than at the sting site or any which cause nausea or general feelings of illness.

While any general practitioner or emergency medical team can deal with a medical crisis arising from a sting, many, if not most, are unqualified to provide advice beyond that point. Bee sting allergy is a very specialised field and even many allergists are actually quite ignorant about bee sting allergy. Think twice about the actual necessity of any prescription a doctor may want to write you on your visit. Many doctors hate to send a patient away with out a prescription for something. Consider how many doctors prescribe antibiotics for a cold. Everyone knows that viruses are not affected by antibiotics, but doctors get a fee for writing prescriptions, and the patient is more likely to go away thinking that he has been helped, so some doctors make a practice of prescribing useless, and possibly harmful, medicine.

Desensitisation

Desensitisation is possible for most people who react badly to stings. Many who have shown signs of bee sting allergy have been able to overcome their problem and resume work with

bees.

Consulting a specialist in bee stings is advised for anyone who experiences a bad reaction. Local bee-keeping organisations can usually advise which local allergists have a good understanding of bee allergies and treatment.

New treatments are currently being developed to simplify the desensitisation process.

Summary

For those of us who love bees and work with them every day that we can, it is sometimes hard to put ourselves in the place of people who have never had that unique pleasure, and have never involved themselves with this amazing part of nature and of life on our planet.

Although bee-keepers usually are not concerned about occasional stings they receive, themselves; most bee-keepers are understanding and appreciate how terrifying a sting can be to those who have not learned about bees and stings.

Bee-keepers try to make sure their bees will not sting neighbours or passers-by. Considering how many beehives and natural swarms can be found in urban areas worldwide, stings to non-bee-keepers are very, very few.

Do consider joining us in learning about and appreciating bees and other insects.

Don't forget that, without bees, we would have much less food on our tables.

Join us. Look around. Find a beekeeper or government bee agent and get involved in helping bees survive in a hostile world.

Important Disclaimer

This information is personal opinion based on 30 years of experience with bees and believed to be true, however each person and each situation is different. YMMV. Use at your own risk.

Readers are cautioned that the author is not a medical authority. This article is not intended to be a substitute for competent personal professional medical opinion. Readers are cautioned to seek medical advice if there is any reason to suspect problems with sensitivity before getting into situations where stings are likely.

Be also aware that diseases, medical conditions personal habits and/ or diets and medications, as well as unusual bee colony history may cause unpredictable events. Although extremely rare, serious and fatal stinging events have been known to occur, even to experienced beekeepers. Always exercise reasonable caution when approaching or working with bees and have a 'Plan B' at the ready.

Allen Dick

[Source: www.honeybeeworld.com/misc/stings.htm](http://www.honeybeeworld.com/misc/stings.htm)

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