

May 2013

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PO Box 1115, Aitkenvale, Q4814

**Special points of interest:**

- **How's Mrs P? Many have asked! See inside for details.**
- **TCC Eco Fiesta, Saturday 4 and Sunday 5 June, 11am-4pm. Register with Grant if you can help 'man' the TDBA stand.**
- **AFB is still rife around town. Be extra vigilant and get on to it early!**

**Next meeting:**

**Sunday 19 May, 2013, 14:00 at Collette Thomas and Ryan Moss' place, 40 Sussex St, Hyde Park. Bring a chair!**

## Newsletter of the Townsville and District Beekeepers Association



[www.beesnorth.org](http://www.beesnorth.org)

### Editorial

Last month I made a comment along the lines of 'before you decide to go ahead and scorch your boxes after an AFB infection, you might want to think again how much your time is worth?' I just want to elaborate a bit on that point. Having now rescued quite a number of boxes from the clutches of AFB using both an oxy-LPG torch and a heat gun (as demonstrated by Grant last month), my inclination is that I probably wouldn't do either again. The blow torch is quick enough but there is little control over the heat. The edges of the boxes often end up completely burnt, including the all important rebated seat on which the frames rest! The heat gun is much more controlled but to do a reasonable job you literally need to spend hours on each box (no joke!). Then there is the sanding, the super-bleach treatment and the painting. And did I mention the mess? For me

all those hours of my time are worth more than the \$22 cost of a new wooden box. In fact next time, I think I'll go for the plastic ones and save myself the considerable cost of copper treating, painting, and again, much more of my time! The added bonus to burning the lot is 'peace of mind' too!

We live and learn...!

Ray



*Mike James gave some valuable tips on hive maintenance at the April meeting. We even got to watch some baby bees hatch!*

### Beautiful honey comb!

One of our honey customers asked if we could supply honeycomb, so we decided to give it a try. We started by setting up an 'ideal' sized super with ten foundation, placing it onto a full depth hive to be drawn out. With a good nectar

flow this happened quickly and our first frames were made. Because it was simpler than first expected, and the increasing requests for honeycomb (it makes a great gift) we decided to dedicate a hive just for comb production, initially setting up the ideal boxes onto a full depth brood box. Over time we switched from this brood box to two ideals, with four boxes above the queen excluder. This has given more space for brood, and the overall height of the hive is only slightly more than that of our full depth hives. We use the most attractive frames for the cut comb, of which the first request was for three frames which were packed and taken to Malaysia! An excellent start to an experimental venture.

Frana



## Minutes of the last Meeting

### Townsville and District Beekeepers Association meeting 21-April-2013.

Before the sit down meeting we opened Derek and Marg's hives. This was lead by Mike James. The newer members were given a good look into the hives and discussion was had on how Derek could improve the size of his bees in one of the hives.

President Dennis A welcomed members and guests.

**Present:** as per signed book, over 21 members

**Apologies:** as per the book.

**Minutes of Previous meeting:** read by Grant

Moved Mike James sec: Paul Payne

Carried.

#### **Matters arising:**

Dave clarified that the native bees he mentioned last meeting were to view and not for removal as stated.

The July meeting is at the rifle club and not the pistol club at Mona Park via Clare.

The PayPal motion was 16 for and 4 against and not as reported

Mike James away until just before Christmas.

Swarms in North Ward and Cromarty.

Sentinel Hives - Frana and Jon might have a spot in North Ward

Sentinel Hives - Rob wants one at the community gardens.

#### **Correspondence:**

No reply from the MPs who have been written to.

**Treasurer's report:** held over but Dennis mentioned we are healthy.

#### **General Business.**

**The roll test. Please report any varroa test particularly negative ones, let Rob Stevens know. He needs to collect data and we can help him here. It is easy so please try, it is our best interest.**

AFB found in other places in and around Townsville. Please don't move affected hives and get help to destroy them if necessary. It is a notifiable disease. Please read what you can about American Foul Brood and we need to minimize the outbreaks occurring in and around Townsville.

Bee registration is now on \$13.90 and is heavily promoted by this club so join and be registered and give the club your registration number.

The more experienced beekeepers will generally be available to help out the newer members so please ask them.

Dave T and Doug Mc removed a swarm and wax from a wall. The wax moth had a field day after the first removal. They are continuing to do bees set in walls of houses. Usually a long and involved job.

Doug will need a hand at different times particularly when a swarm is high. Ron R offered his services when he could. Ron spoke about trying to get a swarm out of a difficult place. he suggested the club have a workshop on how to get a swarm out of a wall. It is a long procedure but worth passing on the information. Dennis spoke about the various methods of trying to get bees out.

Ray spoke on the membership increasing again. The new members need hives and asked if members could consider selling some of their hives to get the going. It is important we consider these people and cater for them. Dennis favours bees from a



Photo: Lindsay Trott

*Freshly drawn burr-comb filled with honey—yum!*

nucleus hives from here in the north rather than package bees from the south.

Graham Armstrong may have package bees, contact him. (see membership list). The Herberton beekeeper ? Kobis could have bees for members as well.

The club has Eco fest on Saturday and Sunday in June and Grant will be ringing around to fill positions in manning the stall. See previous minutes.

Ron and Rose will be available Sunday Afternoon. Grant Saturday morning and Lindsay and others offered their services.

The Biosecurity Warwick Aparies have moved. Phone still the same 132523 if you need them.

The PayPal account. Dennis spoke at length about the concerns of using it and that being a non-Incorporated club he voiced his concerns about the necessity of the move passed at the last meeting.

Dennis Anger moved... That this meeting of the Townsville and District Beekeepers Association rescind the motion passed at the March Townsville and District Beekeepers Association meeting. Seconded by Mike James.

The motion was opened for discussion.

Members gave their point of view and spoke of their experiences of using PayPal and how it could be of use or not to the Association.

The motion was put to the vote. in favour 6 against 0 abstinences 15 (the rest of the members.)

New beetle traps were displayed. These are in the shape of a frame with a 'rough' side on them to catch the beetle's spiky legs. Available from Burnett beekeeping supplies.

The sending away and selling of wax is still on - contact Frana.

Honey flows still coming in in quantities.

Ray gave a brief update on Mrs Patterson's hives but hasn't seen Mrs Patterson for a while.

Thanks to Ray for another informative newsletter.

Please check your details and update Ray if necessary.

Meeting closed at 4.10pm tea and coffee and eats were enjoyed.

Grant

## *So, how's Mrs P. doing?*

This is the question many people have asked us since our article "Taming the Wild" appeared in the Australian Beekeeper Magazine (Feb 2013) and re-printed here last month.

Well, frankly, we were wondering the same thing after our last visit in early April to the DPI/Biosecurity sentinel hive located in her back yard. The house was locked up (not so unusual), the car was missing (understandable if she lost her licence... at age 93!), the yard was clean (quite unusual – the meals-on-wheels packaging always got chucked in the general direction of the bin, but never made it in!) and there were no pigeons or ibises hanging around (even more unusual as these were her pets which got fed chook pellets!). We finished our inspection of the hive, accompanied this day by Rob from Biosecurity Queensland. This left us perplexed and somewhat despondent just like the bees here! In four months, this hive had basically done nothing. Not a gram of extra honey, much of the new foundation we gave them back then was still not drawn out, but the queen was still laying a reasonable amount of brood. The brood looked really nice on some frames, on others it looked a bit dark and patchy. Activity levels out the front of the hive were also definitely on the low side. Alarm bells! AFB? Plenty of this going around recently...! Rob readily agreed to take a few samples and have them tested. We closed up the hive and investigated the house a bit better. Front and back doors were locked and she did not answer our repeated knocking and calling out. It was at this time we realised with some guilt that we had actually never nailed Mrs P down for the contact details of the nephew, whom we knew visited regularly, or any other next-of-kin. Eeek..., we hoped nothing bad had happened to her. We didn't think she came to grief inside the house because the place looked too tidy. Someone had been here recently, but that in itself implied trouble...!

After two weeks we ventured a door knock and according to a neighbour Mrs P had taken a fall and broken her hip! Appar-



*Mrs P's house as we will always remember it, complete with yellow door and those fateful steps that ended her association with this house, ... and possible ours too...!*

ently, some of her family had also come up from Newcastle and cleaned out the house. No other details! Lindsay rang the hospitals and eventually tracked her down. TGH, Geriatric Ward 5 was her temporary new home...!

Mrs P had come to grief at the front steps of her 1930's Queensland house – normally a critical injury and often leading to major life changing outcomes for a single elderly person living alone. "I was lucky because I didn't fall all the way down to the ground" was her characteristically optimistic outlook. Following with "I called out and the neighbours came and got me". Sitting near her hospital bed, Mrs P looked healthier and brighter than we had seen her in the time we have been caretaking her hive. No despondency here! It's probably the regular meals, good care and grooming she gets from the Townsville Hospital staff. She showed no signs of the damage she had done to herself.

But what of the future? – for Mrs P it will almost certainly mean the tragedy of leaving her home of 60+ years ("The Americans camped at the front of my house during the war – nice fellas, they were" and "Did I ever tell you how Jim proposed to me? He didn't have two bob to rub together but he said: If I get a pub, will you marry me? Three days later he came with the papers, what could I say?"). For the hive, it will probably mean finding a new location – that's easy. For us it will mean missing on the dried out rock scones (more honey needed!), humorous and entertaining interaction with an absolutely delightful local treasure who has seen it all, and who has an opinion and a smart comment on all of it. Even from her hospital bed, they kept coming: "Those hospital people came and asked me a whole heap of questions today. I couldn't be bothered answering them, so they told me I'd have to stay in hospital for a while longer?"



*Here she is: Mrs P! Non-conformist, independent and just a touch mischievous! You wouldn't know she had anything wrong with her! (...but we saw her leg - ouch!)*

And another classic: "Do you know I've never tasted beer in my life? My father was an alcoholic so I never touched it! I like a sherry though. The bastards (an aged-care service provider) took it off my shopping list, you know!"

## So, how's Mrs P. doing? (cont)

But there's a more subtle and important experience in all of this. Rooftop, suburban, amateur European and native beekeeping is becoming much more popular for whatever reasons - health, organic living, natural curiosity, big industry rejection etc. What we have found is that amateur beekeeping is a way to connect with neighbours and strangers and to interact on a co-operative basis. The lack of our suburban communication and connectedness is touted as being one of the evils of modern society. Maybe beekeeping is an inclusive community activity that ticks all the boxes for "social interaction in a close knit community" (sounds like a beehive to us!). Beekeeping has provided us with the means to meet a wonderfully optimistic and positive lady in particular, and more generally, to access knowledge and advice from some wise and experienced local beekeepers, and meet interesting locals. What a great way to re-engage with our community – and our reward has been more than the precious jars of honey that our hard little workers pump out.

Long live Mrs P... and our bees!

Ray and Lindsay

## AFB: The telltale signs

For those who have managed to avoid American Foulbrood (AFB) so far—half your luck! But be vigilant! Early detection and destroying the infected hive is the key to stopping this nasty disease from spreading. Here's some signs to look out for.



Photo: Lindsay Trott

*If you see a frame like this, be suspicious! There's plenty of brood, but it's too dark and the laying pattern too patchy.*

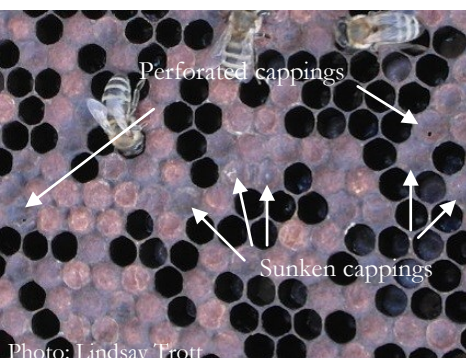


Photo: Lindsay Trott

*Sunken cappings are plentiful. Perforated cappings may be present too, but may be quite subtle depending on the stage of infection. The foul smell may also not be very noticeable*

## Swarm list and meetings

The up to date swarm list as of May 2013 is:

Colette and Ryan Thomas	0487 448893
Ray Berkelmans	0427 473239
Lindsay Trott	0409 789162
Jon and Frana McKinstry	0413 765192
Ron Rapson	0419 219880
Kirsty Sugden	0447 762686
Dan Donovan	0428 186816
Mike James	4773 7657
Grant Whiteford	4728 3051
Paul, Jacinta Payne	0428745340

### Next Meetings:

May the 19th in town, Ryan and Colette's place in Hyde Park

June the 16th, at Dennis's place in Bartlett Rd, south of Giru.

July the 21st, at Dave and Virginia's at the Rifle club Mona Park near Clare

August the 18th, Ron and Rose's the AGM in Mundingburra.



Photo: Lindsay Trott

*Twirl a match or small stick in a few of the sunken cappings and see if it will rope out. If it does, that almost certainly seals the deal! To set your mind at rest, send a few of these match sticks to Biosecurity Qld, together with an AFB form from their website ([http://www.daff.qld.gov.au/documents/Biosecurity\\_GeneralAnimalHealthPestsAndDiseases/1378-bee-submission-forms\\_BACT-051\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.daff.qld.gov.au/documents/Biosecurity_GeneralAnimalHealthPestsAndDiseases/1378-bee-submission-forms_BACT-051_WEB.pdf)) You'll have an answer within a week.*

Ray

## Startup costs for beekeeping

How much does it cost to get started in beekeeping? This is what most newcomers to beekeeping ask.

It depends if you want to jump right in, buy the raw ingredients and make it yourself, purchase ready-made equipment, or do a trial on borrowed equipment.

The best approach is to join your friendly TDBA, where you can call on the expertise and accumulated knowledge from the longer term beekeepers, and share your questions with other "NewBees" who are also just starting up. You can also find out if there is a "spare" starter swarm and nuc box (smaller box for new hives) that is available for loan. Quality Beekeeping Supplies in Brisbane offer this page of advice for what's need to get started for around \$200 with a beeswax foundation hive (single 10-frame box): <http://www.qualitybeekeepingsupplies.com.au/index.php/2-uncategorised/29-starting-a-bee-hive>

Alternatively here is my experience in setting up a hive with plastic frames, a single brood box with a double super on top. You could buy this assembled or prepare it yourself (several weeks in preparation if you take this course):

Cheap cloth hat and elastic sided veil:	\$35
Hive tool	\$17
Hive frames (unassembled) x 30	\$45
Beeswax or plastic foundation x 30	\$45
Smoker	\$69
Queen excluder	\$20
Metal cover	\$10
Lid	\$25
Bottom board, risers and supports	\$25
Emlock clamp	\$10

Apithor trap for SHB	\$6
Oil trap for SHB	\$5

That's a sub-total of \$312 for the gear, but now you have to coat the hive box components (not the frames) with 3 x coats of each of:

Copper naphthanate preservative	\$23/L
Enamacryl (water based enamel)	\$34/L

You are almost ready to get those bees, but now you need to assemble the hive box and frames.

Aquadhere	\$5
Galvanised clouts 30mm x 100	\$6
Treated pine timber screws 40mm x 100	\$8

There goes another \$76, so just under \$400 to get the full starting kit, and several days of painting and assembly. Of course you haven't got any bees yet!, So the availability of a spare swarm, or splitting someone's hive may be required – this will provide you with some valuable hands-on experience!

For advice or offers of loans of bits and pieces, swarm availability and nucs and assembly advice just contact the Club Members, or see the back of the Newsletter and support or our local club sponsors for supplies, or:

Pender Beekeeping Supplies: <http://www.penders.net.au/>

[index.html](#)

Quality Beekeeping Supplies:

<http://www.qualitybeekeepingsupplies.com.au/>

Rod and Karen Palmer:

<http://www.honeybee.com.au/index.html>

Lindsay



*New members Collette and Ryan take off three frames of honey after only a few months of starting with their new hive.*

## Bush bee diary

2 March 2013

I really have a beekeeping problem. The hive numbers were set to 5 then 10 and now after 2 swarms from a hive, there are 12, or 13 with the hive we're babysitting. We are just about out of supers. This time last year we had 4 hives. I think I'll write poetry and give up beekeeping. I've gone from debating with the council to 4 possible town sites. And for the first time in my little beekeeping life, all the hives are strong and bearding ready for Movember! The problem is...I'm sick of painting!

I had to talk about swarms with my mentor extensively today, because this is the first time I've ever had a hive swarm.

Oh no, it's a terrible problem to have!

Being mainly newer hives, I certainly haven't seen tonnes of honey. Italians are building up fine. We extracted about 8 frames in the last 6 or more months. Going to check the first swarm in a minute. Ironically I was at the bee club meeting when the neighbour called, and Lenny and Vic hived it. They said it was about 30x50cm and put it into two 10 frame boxes. They put in a couple of drawn frames too. Our unintentional swarm control in the past has been to have weak and dying hives! I think the swarms came from the hive in which 4 beekeepers from the club couldn't find the queen when we were re-queening in October. It has always been a productive brood queen (from a frame of eggs I was given to save my last dying hive). I saw 5 or so chewed out queen cells on the bottom of a frame and assumed the swarms

## Bush bee diary (cont)

were from this hive. Its partner hive has a younger queen, and if it holds true that a queen won't swarm in her first year, they probably weren't from that one.

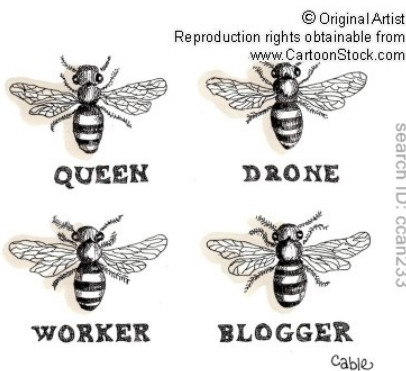
The first swarm is doing pretty good. There is capped brood and plenty of eggs and drawn comb in the bottom super.

I think I will need to read up more on swarm control in the coming year.

25 March 2013

I thought things were running strangely smooth for a while. The 2 swarms were next to a pair of hives and after seeing eaten swarm cells in the older hive I assumed both swarms were from there. So I didn't check the brood of the hive with a barely year-old queen until a few days ago and voila\*, queenless and no brood! The older hive had only a few eggs which I "borrowed" for the queenless one, and my mentor said to check in 5 or 6 days to see if they are bringing out a queen cell and add more brood then. That will be tomorrow. Crikey, how does anyone manage to survive the ravages of swarms?

(\* make sure voila has the correct accent or our French speaking members (Grant) will be upset!).



By the way, I'm a commercial beekeeper from today. A lady sold honey and wax for me at the market and when I went by at 1130 she had sold one jar of honey and one wax stick. I bought a bottle of mango sauce from her and

so far have a 50c loss.

Poor me.

1 April 2013

We checked the queenless hive for queen cells last week..and none. So we added another frame of eggs and while looking in the hives for eggs to lend, found another hive with capped brood but no eggs! Checked again today and both hives have queen cells so they escaped a newspaper combine. I wonder if we've had a few autumn swarms leave the hives in a sorry state.

Those bees are sure lucky to have Keepers!

28 April 2013

Both of the queenless hives now have queens. We found out a week ago there is a surprise honey flow on. Iron bark, chinee apple, and other honey trees are in flower. I lost count of how much we extracted, but it must have been about 60 litres. So it's not just the hive equipment we are running short on. We

bought 5 more honey buckets from Bunnings the other day. We put in an order for more gear also, but they told me it's easier and cheaper for me to make the lids and bottom boards. You can just picture me sanding and painting, painting and sanding.....

1 May 2013

We checked a hive or two on Sunday and they're filling them up again. In fact, on the extraction day, I put plain foundations back in the hives till we had some stickies. The next day I checked one hive and three plain foundations had been fully drawn overnight. Things are going so well, I am waiting for the usual disasters that beset my beekeeping experience. That will fill the next diary entry, to be sure!

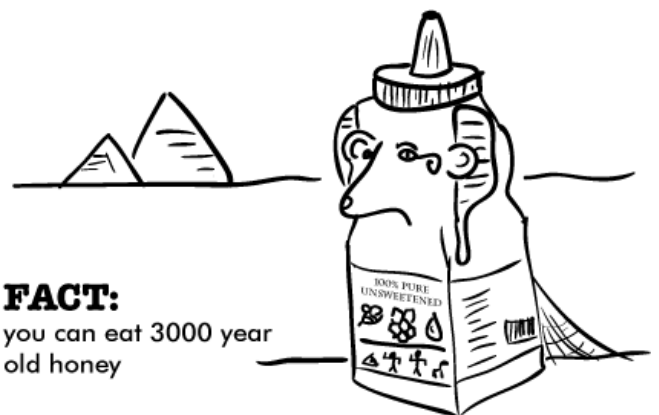
Leonie and Lenny

## Can honey go "off"?

"Honey can last forever" some say; the sugar content is "too high" and the water content is "too low" for bacteria to grow; honey has natural "antibacterial" ingredients so it kills germs, and there are many examples of the healing properties of honeys. One story has it that edible honey was found in sealed jars buried with some 2500 year old Egyptian mummies – now that's a long "use by date"! So can honey go "off"?

Well - yes it can; according to the book ABC and XYZ of Bee Culture (40<sup>th</sup> Edition, and available for borrowing from your friendly TDBA Librarian, Lindsay Trott).

How does honey go off? A little chemistry and biology will help explain it. Foraging bees collect nectar (nectar is sucrose, water, vitamins, coloured compounds and aromatic chemicals as well as



*Mmmm...., well, only if it hasn't crystallized too badly....*

a few natural yeasts from flowering plants). The sucrose in nectar is converted to glucose and fructose by an enzyme secreted by the bees – invertase. Honey contains predominantly two simple sugars – glucose and fructose (plus about 3% sucrose), and when honey granulates or "crystallises", it is the glucose that forms the solid crystals while the fructose remains in liquid solution. Glucose crystals have two forms, one is a "dry" crystal without water

## *Can honey go “off”? (Cont)*

molecules around it, while the other form is a hydrated form containing about 9.09% water, which is half the water content usually contained in liquid honey (around 18% water). So the solid part of crystallised honey is pure glucose and it has a reduced water content, but the uncrystallised liquid portion now has a higher water content, which allows any yeasts present in raw unpasteurised honey to ferment. Fermented honey cannot be salvaged. Pasteurised honey does not go “off”, but its flavour, natural antibacterial compounds, active enzymes, and colour can all be altered by the process. All creamed honey is pasteurised in a controlled crystallising process that keeps the crystals so small that our most sensitive taste buds at the roof of our mouth do not detect the tiny sugar grains, and hence it tastes “creamy”. Creamed honey will not re-crystallise because it is already “micro” crystallised.

Lindsay

## *So how does a beekeeper spend Easter?*

Over the past couple of weeks we’ve been checking our hives, partly to ensure overall health, what with the recent AFB outbreak, and partly to prepare to leave them for a couple of months while we’re away.

One thing we’ve found doing a hive inspection is to have no expectations. Hive #1, five weeks ago had a marked queen, capped brood and plenty of laying room. On inspection the first thing we noticed was how light the super was, then the low number of bees. Found the queen easily enough, but she was unmarked. Conclusion, a swarming must have taken place, making a previously strong hive somewhat weaker for a while.

Good Friday saw us checking another hive . . . something seemed to be missing – no brood whatsoever and no queen either! What was interesting was the honeycomb pattern on one of the frames – large irregular cells, right over the whole frame (see photo). It cer-



*Unusual honeycomb pattern in this frame*

tainly wasn’t like that when we put it in.

Having no brood frames from another hive readily available, we decided the best solution for this hive was to do a merge. We transferred frames from the brood box to an old super, had a spare base on hand and transferred the two supers to two other hives.

Onto hive #3 – doing well, full frames, lots of brood and high population. Then #4 – this had only a few capped brood cells, and again, no queen. We reduced the supers from two to one, and added two frames with brood from the adjacent hive, in the hope that they would raise another queen. Timing is everything – just days before we had re-queened two other hives, one which was a split from an overcrowded hive and the other where the boss and his mate thought the queen was a bit old, perhaps we should have waited. By the way, don’t put a queen bee in a matchbox, its not good for her health.

With this run of luck, by Easter Sunday we weren’t feeling confident in checking the results of the re-queening. The first hive, she was out and easily located. Caught and marked her (thanks Grant, needed the practice). On to the next one, on the third pass, and starting to get worried, we finally located that queen, and marked her as well. Thing were starting to look up.

Easter Monday had us checking a hive in North Ward. Early in March, we’d removed six full frames from nine. This time, what a thrill to find another four frames completely full and the others nearly so. Solid brood over nearly all frames, no SHB and quiet bees! We even added a second super to this text-book perfect hive . . . well, so far it is! Next check due late April.

Later the same day, checking the ‘ideal’ hive – the one we use for honeycomb production, we found the queen easily at first, but after moving some frames around in the double brood box, couldn’t find her again. Two or three passes and still no luck, until the boss noticed a cluster of bees at his feet. There was the queen with some attendant bees, just inches from his boot. She had dropped off the frame at some stage, luckily spotted just in time to avert disaster.

An update on hive #4 where there was no queen and minimal brood. We transferred this hive to home for care & maintenance, and on checking a week later, found the marked queen. Still no brood present, except for that on the two frames we had added. For some reason she had stopped laying. We put this down to stress on moving after doing a split a couple of weeks prior, and perhaps insufficient food source at the new location. With reduced numbers and evidence of stress, we removed the super, brushing all remaining bees into the brood box. Since then, she has resumed laying, we will wait and see if she regains her former vigour or needs to be replaced.

One thing about beekeeping, there is always something new to keep us on our toes.

Fran

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**WFI Ingham 47763155**

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