

## **Extreme Winter Losses on Vancouver Island – What is happening to the Honey Bees?**

**Linda Geggie**

If you haven't heard by now Beekeepers on Vancouver Island experienced pronounced losses of colonies over the winter. It seems that most of the losses were in the mid island but from conversations with Beekeepers from around the Capital Region, it is clear that most Beekeepers here also experienced heavy losses. At the Capital Region Beekeepers' Association, where you can find a wide range of practices and deep expertise, I polled members about their experiences over the winter. I had lost my four colonies and wondered, "What had gone wrong?". I soon found that I was not alone. The President, Brian Scullion, attended a meeting in Duncan with the Valley Beekeepers and Provincial Apiarist Paul Van Westendorp. He reported out on this meeting in the Capital Region Beekeepers Association, March 2010 Beeline Newsletter :



“There were about forty people in the room, and one by one they told their crushing stories of bee loss. I was stunned to hear those that wintered down over 300 colonies, and by January all but about 60 remain wintered 30 and lost all, wintered 175 and have 19 left, wintered 22 and have 3. wintered 12 and have 1. There were tears in the room, and it was well over an hour to before all had told the facts of their loss. Losses in that room were very close to 1000 colonies and maybe 159 remain. You don't need a percentage, or a dollar sign to see the devastating costs over the past several months.”

Although most speculate the loss is due to increasing varroa mite problems and building resistance to one of the main methods of treatment (Apistan), others are pointing to pesticide applications and still others wonder about Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD).

At the Duncan meeting, Brian Scullion observed, “There was no pattern to the losses, as all beekeepers treatments were varied, but timely and according to best practices. All reported colonies going into late summer/early fall with abundant bees with good stores of pollen and honey. By early winter losses were starting to show, and by early February the devastation was pronounced.”

There are calls to support the Beekeepers and also a worry over replenishing our bee numbers. However, Vancouver Island has been under quarantine to the importation of to bringing bees onto the island since the early 1990s (including bringing used bee equipment onto the island). Queen's must be imported from places like Hawaii, Chile, New Zealand in the Southern Hemisphere. This quarantine creates increased costs for

Island honey producers, but at the same time has protected Island bees from American and European Foulbroad, diseases that plague our continental neighbors.

I was able to find more bees from a local supplier to replace my colonies, but had to get my order in early. I thought my Queens may be coming from Chile but because of the earthquake, it looks like they will now be from Hawaii. I hope they bring some of that Aloha spirit with them!

Want to read more? See the Times Colonist Report March 9, 2010

<http://www.timescolonist.com/technology/Island+beekeepers+face+massive+winter+mortality/2660401/story.html>