

Varroa Mite

{Intended as a sample writing article for a newspaper job, you know, should I ever apply for one. Lots of the 'articles' in this section are trial/sample writing articles in pursuit of such a gig. Of course, I never did much pursue one... other than writing these articles, that is.}

You can learn some strange stuff here in Kamuela if you go to any of the free lectures about town. For instance, if you had gone to the AAAS (American Academy for Advancement of Science) sponsored lecture held at HPA (Hawaii Preparatory Academy) this week as put on by the fine folks at the Volcano Island Honey Company (which to break the trend is not known as VIHC), you would have learned that over 200,000 queen bees are exported from the islands every year, and that something like 10,000 hives produce over one million pounds of honey in Hawaii every year, at a wholesale price of around \$4,000,000. If you do the math, that comes down to \$4/lb. It also means--if you do a little more math--that when you and I buy those little itzy bitsy 8oz jars of honey at one of those tourist shops for like \$10, we are getting reamed. This, of course, is not one of the things that was covered in the lecture, but if you had been there, you could have asked about it. You could have said something like, "Hey, why we get reamed all da time?" I say you could have, not just because we both know you're too good natured to pull a stunt like that, but also because there were only like a dozen or so of us there at the meeting, and nobody besides me and my lady were wearing slippers. Now, to be fair, I was mostly taking notes and I didn't actually check every foot in the place, so I could be wrong, but I didn't get the feeling that the pasty faced crowd (if twelve makes a crowd) was comprised of locals. Don't ask me why no one else who lives around here showed up. I guess that's just the way it is. Bees, who cares?

In an ironic twist, one of the things that was mentioned at the meeting was the public's apathy--that would be you and me again--towards the plight of the honey bee, and the impending varroa mite infestation. You might have heard in the news how the bees are getting decimated on the mainland. It's mainly from stuff like Colony Collapse Disorder (a name that indicates the big wigs don't know what's causing it), but the varroa mites (who suck the bees' blood like little vampires) and tracheal mites (that do the same thing inside their lungs) play a role as well. Anyhow, the point is, normally on the mainland, hives die off at a rate of like 20-35% per year--it's just what they do--but now they're dying off at twice that rate--if not more. Bad news. And varroa mites are part of the problem.

Why us folks on the Big Hawaii might be interested in all this is that we're one of the few places that don't have varroa mites. Actually, it's pretty much down to us and Australia at this point. Of course, New Zealand was clean only a few short years ago, but they weren't able to keep the mites from spreading to all of their islands once the buggers hit the first one, and the little suckers are already on Oahu. So, I guess what I am saying is that basically, the clock is ticking, and it's just a matter of time before they make it here to the Big Island.

I'm pretty much a fatalist, so no real worries. What's one more undocumented illegal alien anyway? Bottom line is, the varroa mites are all packed and ready to go. The only real unknown left is when they're coming, you know, which particular plane, boat, or strong air current are they going to hitch a ride on. It's not really a matter of whether they are going to make the crossing or not anymore, it's simply a matter of when. Granted, it's unfortunate that we'll lose an estimated \$40 odd million a year in agricultural revenue when it happens, but it's basically a done deal.

If you're one of those gung ho people, who despite all evidence to the contrary think they can change the world, well, you might want to do something. Got me as to exactly what.

But for those of you who think raising awareness is part of the answer, hopefully you'll concede that I've got that one covered by virtue of this article. It's my little way of helping out, and, you know, allowing others to concentrate on doing something meaningful and productive to the stop impending the varroa mite tide. That's always the hard one. Talking about it doesn't actually do anything. Anyway, I think I heard someone mention the tide, and it looks to me like the surf is rolling in, so you'll excuse me. I'm going to leave the solution to better minds, which I guess in this case means you. So do as you like about the varroa mites... or you could just join me in the curl. I mean, the choice is yours. I'm pretty cool with it all either way.

{And that's today's surfing report...}

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