



MEDIA RELEASE

7 November 2019

More Asian honey bees suspected at Townsville Port

Key points:

- Townsville residents are urged to check their properties and report bees, nests or swarms to 13 25 23 following a new discovery of Asian honey bee wings near the Port of Townsville.
- A nest of Asian honey bees carrying varroa mite was destroyed at the port earlier this year.
- Varroa mites could significantly damage the Australian bee industry and agricultural sector, disrupting honey production and pollination services.

Main story:

Biosecurity Queensland is calling on Townsville residents - particularly those living close to the Townsville port - to check their properties for bees following new evidence of Asian honey bee.

The National Varroa Mite Eradication Program in Townsville has again detected the presence of the imported bee pests (*Apis cerana*), this time through laboratory testing of Rainbow bee-eater pellets collected from two sites just outside the port boundary.

The pellets were collected in October in Cannan Street and on Benwell Road.

It follows the discovery of a nest of Asian honey bees that was confirmed to be carrying the destructive varroa mite at the Townsville port in May this year.

Varroa mites could significantly damage the Australian bee industry, disrupting honey production and pollination services. Early detection is vital to eradication and containment efforts.

National Varroa Mite Eradication Program acting manager Robert Stephens said the team had ramped up surveillance activity within a 2km radius of the port in an effort to find the nest the bees had originated from.

“Field staff have been all over the port as well as the neighbouring suburbs of South Townsville and Railway Estate since the wings were confirmed as being from the Asian honey bee,” he said.

“But we urgently need people to check their backyards for bees, nests and swarms and report any findings to us on 13 25 23.

“Asian honey bees are a natural host for the varroa mite but are not usually found in Townsville so finding the bee gives officers the best chance of finding the mite.”

Rainbow bee-eater birds are a critical link to finding the Asian honey bee and the varroa mite.

“The Rainbow bee-eater eats bees but are unable to digest their wings, which are later regurgitated as a pellet,” Mr Stephens said.

“These pellets are collected and examined so any evidence of Asian honey bee can be identified.

“Varroa mite are the size of a pin head and extremely hard to spot so we need to focus on finding the host, the Asian honey bee, first. That’s why we’re asking Townsville residents to be on the lookout for any unusual bees, nests or swarms and report them to us.

“Like our European honey bee, the Asian honey bee will forage on flowers but are smaller, not as hairy and look darker and glossier. Look for bees clustered into a swarm or nests in small hollows like trees, eaves, letter boxes and compost bins. If you see them, report it.”

“Examination of these pellets in the laboratory allows us to determine the species of bees the birds have been feeding on.

Report any possible sightings of Asian honey bees to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23 or online at biosecurity.qld.gov.au

Media: Deborah Rule 0436 916 667