



SCHOOL BEEES

by Margaret Cahill

Students at Oturu School found out that bee numbers were rapidly falling in New Zealand. They wanted to do something about it, so they decided to set up some beehives to increase the numbers of bees in their area. Luckily they had an expert on hand to give them lots of advice. Their principal, Mr Smith, used to be a beekeeper!

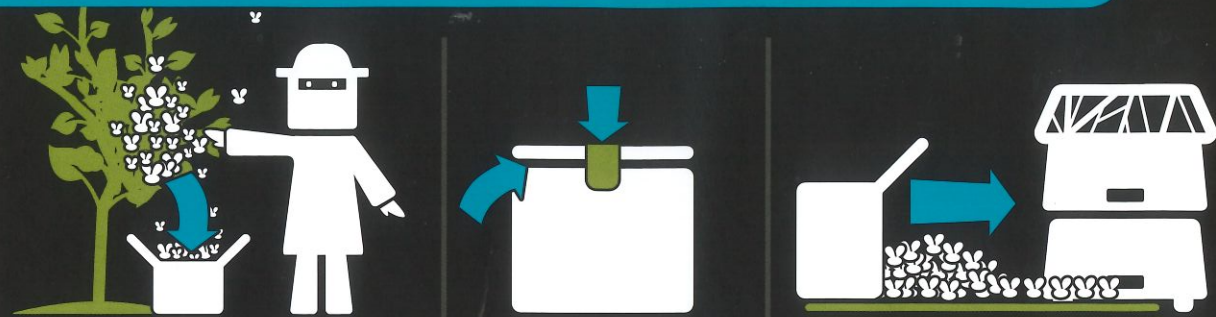


Mr Smith
opening a hive

The students had already planted native plants, and they had big vegetable gardens and lots of fruit trees at their school. They knew that their bees would have plenty of nectar to eat and plenty of work to do pollinating their plants.

They started by luring a swarm of wild honey bees into one hive. This is how it happened ...

HOW OTURU SCHOOL CAUGHT THEIR BEES



ONE They found a swarm of bees on a feijoa bush. Mr Smith put a box under the bees, shook the branches, and the bees dropped into the box.

TWO Then Mr Smith taped it up, leaving tiny gaps for air, and put the box in his office.

THREE The next day, Mr Smith spread a sack between the box and a wooden hive. He opened the box, and the bees walked along the sack and into their new home.

When the students became expert at looking after bees, the Northland Regional Council gave them money for a honey extractor. It also paid for bee suits to protect the kids from stings when they are working with the bees.

“We used to be a bit scared of bees,” says Manaaki.

“Yes,” says Teina. “When they flew near us in the playground, we’d fling our arms around and yell. Now we know to stay still and to move calmly, and the bees hardly ever sting us.”

The pests and diseases that are harming bees all over the world affect the school hives too. The students found dead and dying bees with shrivelled wings outside the base of a hive. That’s when they learnt to recognise varroa mites.

The students sell their honey at the Kaitaia Market. They also use the honey and beeswax in the creams and ointments they make from native plants. Sometimes they make wax sculptures with the beeswax.

Oturu students Ayvran, Manaaki, Anna Leah, and Teina went to Wisconsin in the United States to take part in an international problem-solving competition. They explained the problems that bees were having around the world. They also talked about the work the Oturu kids were doing to boost bee numbers around their school. The whole school was excited when they won second place.



Mr Smith checking a frame of honeycomb



Ayvran, Fern, and Manaaki setting up a hive



Extracting the honey

Oturu students have many more projects planned to help bees. They hope to work with the Northland Regional Council to plant bee-friendly plants on empty sites throughout the Far North.

They're investigating how they can use propolis in their healing ointments. Propolis is a sticky extract that bees collect from the buds and sap of trees and plants. Bees use propolis to seal tiny gaps in their hives to keep parasites out and to seal off any rotting materials. Propolis is known to have antibiotic properties, so the students think they will be able to discover good uses for it.

Then there's the school shop they'd like to set up in the old shelter shed. The school produces free-range eggs, vegetables, skin creams and healing ointments, olive oil, and now honey. A shop to sell these healthy products is the next step.

Way to go, Oturu!



Honey from the school bees - yum!