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Varroa Mites Spread Across Gippsland Beehives

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— *Categories: General News*

A dangerous parasite, the varroa mite, has been detected in beehives across Gippsland, Victoria, posing a threat to honey bee colonies and the local apiculture industry. Beekeepers are being advised to monitor their hives to manage potential losses.

The Gippsland Apiarist Association has highlighted the financial and ecological risks posed by the infestation. President Stan Glowacki explained that a single mite entering a hive can multiply quickly, potentially affecting the colony within six to nine months. “Whether a beekeeper manages one hive or 1,000, there can be economic and operational consequences,” he said. “For those with hundreds of hives, costs may increase significantly.”

Varroa destructor mites infest adult honey bees and their broods, weakening colonies and spreading viruses. They are especially problematic for commercial and hobbyist beekeepers once established.

The pests were first detected in New South Wales in June 2022, prompting authorities to euthanise around 14,000 hives in an initial eradication effort. Officials later determined complete elimination was not feasible and have shifted toward management strategies to control infestations.

In Victoria, beekeepers now rely on chemical treatments and consistent hive monitoring, with annual costs averaging around \$40 per hive. Glowacki likened the mite’s effect to “a serious parasite affecting bee health,” illustrating the threat each infestation poses.

He noted that once a female mite enters a hive and a brood hatches, the threat can increase. “Even small backyard hives are at risk,” he said. “Beekeepers need to maintain regular inspections to protect their colonies.”

Looking ahead, the industry aims to breed bee colonies with genetics capable of resisting varroa mites, reducing reliance on chemical controls. Until then, ongoing vigilance and proper management practices are necessary to limit colony losses and treatment costs.

Authorities continue to work with local apiarists to manage the pest, emphasizing early detection and regular inspections as key strategies to control spread. With honey bee populations under pressure, beekeepers’ proactive management is important to support Victoria’s honey production and agricultural economy.

The economic impact extends beyond individual hives. Honey production supports local businesses, pollination services, and the wider agricultural sector. Effective varroa mite management contributes to sustaining both beekeeper livelihoods and the broader regional economy.