

Introduction to the symposium

Pieter A. Oomen, Chairman ICP-BR Bee Protection Group & Editor

Some facts about the Bucharest symposium

The 10th International Symposium, Hazards of Pesticides to Bees, of the International Commission for Plant-Bee Relationships (ICPBR) Bee Protection Group was held at the Conference Hall of the Romanian Beekeeping Association, 42 Blv Ficusului, 013975 Bucharest in Romania on October 8th to 10th 2008. The 79 participants were welcomed by the Chairman of the Bee Protection Group, Dr. Pieter A. Oomen. The president of the Romanian Beekeeping Association Dr. Eugen Zorici, the Director General of the Research Institute for Apiculture Dr. Petre Moraru, both the hospitable hosts of the symposium, also welcomed the participants. Prof. Horia Iliescu, director of the Plant Protection Research Institute, opened the symposium on behalf of Dr. Elena Leaota, director of the Phytosanitary Agency of the Ministry of Agriculture of Romania. The chairman warmly thanked these hosts of the symposium for their hospitality and cooperation. On behalf of the ICP-BR Bee Protection Group he also thanked the sponsors of the meeting:

- BASF Ag
- Bayer CropScience AG
- Dow AgroSciences
- E.I. Dupont de Nemours
- Syngenta Ltd.

The chairman then introduced the working group board members and organisers of the symposium: Helen Thompson – secretary, Gavin Lewis – vice-chairman, Dietrich Brasse – vice chairman, and himself, Pieter Oomen – chairman. They were effectively supported by the local organisers Cristian Constantinescu – director general of Apimondia Romania, Cristina Mateescu – Research Institute for Apiculture, Carmen Mincea – Research Institute for Plant Protection.

Why ICP-BR, why this 10th Symposium, why in Bucharest, Romania?

Chairman Pieter Oomen explained the role this ICPBR working group has played in the last 30 years in Europe. The Bee Protection Group is formed by scientists committed to the safety of honeybees and other bee species in agricultural crops and to ensure that they are not harmed by the approved use of plant protection chemicals. The Group fully accepts the need for agricultural chemicals and the vital part they play in efficient food production. The ICP-BR Bee Protection Group held its first meeting in Wageningen in 1980 and over the subsequent 30 years has become the established expert forum for addressing the risk of pesticides to bees. It has operated by reaching consensus amongst a wide range of experts active in this field drawn from industry, regulatory authorities and research institutes across the European Union (EU). Operating through the EPPO honey-bee sub-group, it has produced the testing methodology and risk assessment guidance currently used under Directive 91/414/EEC. It remains a scientific conscience of the effectiveness of the honey-bee risk assessment and risk management in the EU by monitoring and discussing effects and recommending solutions to EPPO, OECD and EU. In this 10th symposium, also a delegation from the Belgian and French beekeepers associations participated, who presented her view on effective honey bee protection.

In view of new developments on honey-bee protection in Europe and the world, e.g. suspicions about the possible causes of so called colony collapse disorder, bad overwintering successes of colonies, pesticide caused incidents in different countries, the European and Mediterranean Plant Protection organisation EPPO had required the ICP-BR Bee Protection group to recommend about the updating of the current risk assessment approach and initiate the necessary preparations. This request was an important reason to organise this symposium.

This 10th meeting was organised in Romania in order to involve also the new EU member countries, and because of Romania's recent history with beekeeping, Apimondia activities, twinning activities, good facilities and enthusiasm among the Romanian colleagues to host this meeting. Also the chairman's recent activities in Romania as RTA (as Resident Twinning Adviser during 2006 and 2007 in the Romanian Ministry of Agriculture) had been another reason.

About the programme

The programme of the symposium existed of sessions on (a) Tests and risks assessment, (b) Bumble bees and other species, (c) Test methodology, (d) Regulatory issues, (e) Excursion to the interesting Snagov area with informal dinner, intended to enable participants to establish personal contacts and networks, (f) Plenary discussion for revision of the EPPO guideline and risk assessment scheme, and finally (g) Reports about honey bee poisoning incidents and monitoring schemes, this year with particular attention for actual incidents caused by dust abrasion from treated seeds in Germany, France, Italy and Slovenia. And of course there was a poster session on these subjects.

The essentials of the work of ICP-BR Bee Protection Group, both past and current, are summarised by vice chairman Gavin Lewis in his presentation.

New in this symposium was the presentation of a beekeepers view upon risks and risk assessments in Europe by a representation of Belgian and French beekeepers association. Their extensive view is published in these proceedings.

Major attention in this symposium was given to the results of the three different working groups, established at earlier symposia, notably York 2005, in order to solve the recently emerged problems of systemic effects through seed and soil treatments, of semi-field and field testing, and honey-bee brood testing. Their proposals were plenary discussed in order to hear the expert comments and recommendations of the whole symposium and to take profit of the 30 years of accumulated expertise. The working group coordinators would elaborate their group's proposals with these comments and recommendations, after which these proposals will be offered to EPPO as recommended material for an updated EPPO scheme for testing and risk assessment of pesticide effects on honey-bees.

The presentations and proposals presented in the different sessions are reproduced in these symposium proceedings as paper or abstract of presentation by the respective authors. The plenary discussion is fully described by the secretary Helen Thompson.

During the symposium, Dietrich Brasse from Germany announced his departure as vice chairman of this Bee Protection Group. His departure was regretted but his contributions during many years were very much appreciated, in particular his promise for this symposium to publish the proceedings in the Julius Kühn Archive. His successor, also from Germany, will be Ingo Tornier of EuroFins Agrosience Services. The symposium very much welcomed Ingo Tornier as new vice chairman.

Conclusions

Major results of the meeting were the reports of the three working groups, established at the previous symposium (2005) in York UK. Working groups are an established tool of the Bee Protection Group, by which issues that are identified at the meetings as requiring further work are taken forward by volunteers representing industry, regulatory authorities and research institutes. The three working groups made recommendations in the regulatory review: systemic effects of seed and soil treatments, bee brood effects and field-testing as well as the bee brood ring-testing group. In addition, the bumble bee working group had continued its work and collected further data that will allow a comparison to be made between honey-bee and bumble-bee susceptibility to pesticides. All working groups presented their findings for consideration by the whole meeting. These proposals were discussed and agreed upon by nearly all representatives at the symposium. Only the representation of Beekeepers Associations from Belgium and France, led by Janine

Kievits, made reservations. Their views, however, extensively published further in these proceedings, are being taken as source of inspiration by the working groups in their further elaboration of the proposals.

The recommendations of the working groups record the views of the majority of the 79 experts present at the meeting in Bucharest. These experts represent the accumulated knowledge and experience gained in the Bee Protection Group over the last 29 years and of the government departments, beekeeping organisations and commercial companies represented by the many members of the Group.

The Bee Protection Group will offer the recommendations of the working groups to EPPO, and assist in developing these into an updated risk assessment scheme for pollinators, for better protecting the honey bees, bumble bees and other pollinators from the negative effects of plant protection products. This way the ICP-BR Bee Protection group will continue to provide its expertise to EPPO, EU and other interested organisations.