



From the Field - Pollen Washout

The flowering throughout the Northern Rivers was exceptional. Due to timely rain, fertiliser applied beforehand was taken in effectively by the trees. Flush was healthy and flourishing. The perfect recipe for nut set was in place, even the canker affected trees were displaying well.

On average, displays were 1% to 5% set per tree with the main white flower open in preparation for pollination. Consistent light soft rainfalls soaked in beautifully, maintaining ground moisture. Then humidity crept in while the weather remained overcast, triggering a possible botrytis scare.

Monitoring a number of orchards indicated some evidence of botrytis on the dead tips of flowers caused by various insect attacks. The skies cleared, winds began to dry out orchards, and the botrytis scare appeared to be over.

In September, heavy rains fell followed by more overcast humid days with no wind. Initially it did not seem to have an effect on the flowering. Two weeks later proved to the contrary. A large percentage of the heavy flowering in the region had commenced to die; not because of the spread of botrytis but due to pollen washout. Botrytis engulfed the dying racemes as a secondary effect but was not the initial cause of the devastation. Decaying flowers, unaffected by botrytis were left hanging as brown to orange coloured dried arrangements. The botrytis fungus is evident by the greying affect on the racemes caused by the numerous grey hair like structures of the fungus.

Among the racemes that were hit with pollen washout, the young nut survivors began to emerge as the mass of dead matted flower material dropped from the trees.

Not all areas were affected by pollen washout. The coastal strip on the ocean side of the Pacific highway was spared. A patchwork pattern of unaffected parts in the region also escaped the flower destruction. Pollen washout was not confined to variety, it was a susceptible stage of flowering. Earlier sets, in the tree tops that had access to light are the survivors.

Feedback from apiarists indicate that what commenced as the beginnings of a bumper season for honey production has made a complete turnaround in a number of areas. The massive flower kill in the region was not caused by botrytis or thrip damage, they simply drowned.

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