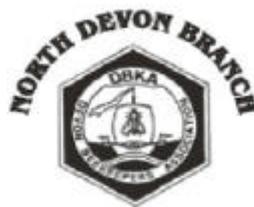


NORTHERN LIGHTS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTH DEVON BRANCH
OF THE DEVON BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

November 2006

www.northdevonbees.org



Editorial

First, an apology for the rather late arrival of your copy of Northern Lights. I make 2 excuses in my defence.

Firstly, as some of you know, I have recently sold my house and am in the throes of moving (hopefully to Somerset) so Marilyn and I are rather preoccupied in trying to find somewhere to live whilst simultaneously clearing out 8 years of accumulated junk.

Secondly, my computer blew up last week, necessitating the replacement of the motherboard. I wonder what the third thing will be !!

Anyway, whilst on the subject of moving, I have had to consider the question of my bee colonies. I would like to take them with me, but at present do not know where I will end up. In the meantime therefore I am going to move my three "home" colonies out to join the two at my out-apiary where they can stay until I am more settled (yet another good reason to have a second site for your colonies).

In consulting the various notes and books I have to hand, it struck me that most of the advice is aimed at moving colonies during the active season and very little reference is made to transporting them in the Winter. Presumably, this should be easier, as overheating and dehydration are unlikely to be a problem, but I wonder if there are any specific problems involved in moving them during this period. Bees in a cluster, will presumably be disturbed and the cluster will break up, but I suspect that little long term damage will be incurred. I will try and pick a mild day, so that the bees will be active (but confined within the hive).

To my mind, the only major problem will be the weight, as the hives are now equipped with all their winter stores

and consequently weigh a fair bit. What's more, the recent rains will prevent me from using my "converted" ride-on mover to ferry them up the rather steep field in which they reside. Time to employ those Russian shot putters again !!

Chairman's Chat

Eggesford Apple Weekend was very successful, so thanks to all of you who came along to help out on the stand or just to support the event.

Last Tuesday we discussed the pros and cons of setting up a Hire System for the Food Grade Mineral Oil Fogger which the apiary uses to control varroa. We came to the conclusion that the idea was great but in reality there were far too many drawbacks, like insurance and health and safety issues.

However, we can demonstrate the use of the fogger to any of you who are interested and we would be happy to discuss its benefits and methods of use.

Finally, but most importantly, congratulations to Ruth Neal who, with her first honey harvest, entered the National Honey Show "just for experience" and came away with "Highly Commended" in the World Open Class.

Well done Ruth.

Chris T



The Fogger in Action

NOTICE OF THE BRANCH AGM

Another year has slipped by and the Branch AGM is set for Saturday 2nd December at The Castle Centre Barnstaple at 6.30 pm. (Note time)

Please come along and support your committee and its officers.

Branch Secretary

Quick Diary

Wednesday 22nd November

Talk by Chris Utting: *A Beekeeper's View of Lithuania* 7.30pm. Castle Centre, Barnstaple.

Saturday 2nd December

Branch AGM & Talk by Mike Long, Chairman of N Devon Search & Rescue Team. **6.30pm**. Castle Centre, Barnstaple.

Saturday 9th December

Quince Honey Farm Visited

In his own unique style, Paddy Wallace welcomed about twenty of our members to a tour of the biggest honey farm in the country (*some 1,500 hives, Ed.*). Founded in 1949 by Paddy's father, the farm has grown and developed into a major tourist attraction.

Ascending to the first floor level we were able to look down through the large glass observation panels into the various work rooms. With just a little twinge - a *deja vu* feeling - like the voyeurs of *Big Brother*, we peered down onto the amazing scenes. Amazing for us mere hobbyist beekeepers privileged to witness the alternative world of the big bee farmer.

First the candle making chamber. All shapes and sizes of candles. Dipping frames ready set up with wicks. Every type of mould - and all left like the *Marie Celeste* as the workers had downed tools at the end of the day, ready for an immediate re-start next morning. Then the fearsomely encased flagellate uncapping machine where no fingers dare intrude. On to the two giant extractors holding scores of frames ready to apply enormous centrifugal forces to pull the reluctant honey out of the frames.

Then the enormous steel honey holding tank with the sack filters hanging like bloated sausages as the unwanted particulates are held back from the high quality honey. Finally the bottling room where lines, rows then cases and even barrels of honey were ready for dispatch to all parts of the kingdom. All so different from the back yard beekeeper.

Then on to see the colonies of bees in many and varied locations. A chimney, a post box, a roof cavity, traditional skeps and even a beehive - all could be opened to view the intimacy of the colony by merely pressing a button that activated an electric motor reminding one of childhood times past in the Science Museum in Kensington.

Paddy then invited us into the cafe area where over a cuppa and biscuits he explained his own very unique colony management. Trailers loaded high dropping off 40 hives at each apiary site. Shallower supers than we use to retain the heat for comb drawing. No queen excluders and queen rearing by just splitting a colony into two. A two gallon cocktail of syrup and FumidialB in the Autumn and a *Varroa* control that he was not prepared to share with us. Finally we shared a stimulating and interesting discussion that made some of us consider are we doing our beekeeping the right way.

Our appreciation and thanks to Paddy and his family



was expressed by Dave James. A collection was made on behalf of the childrens' charity CLIC and produced a remarkably generous £79.85.

Chris Utting

Beekeeping Classes

I am thinking of running a class over the winter for any members who have attended the Beginners classes and would like to move on and cover some items which, after some practical experience, need further explanation.

We will cover :-

The making up and use of nucs

Queen Introduction

Queen raising for 2-3 colonies

Mite monitoring and treatments

Presentations, and anything else that the group desires.

There will be 10 lessons (4 before and 6 after Xmas) on selected Thursday evenings, 7-9pm in Braunton.

Initial dates are as follows (those after Xmas to be advised later):

16th & 23rd November, 7th & 14th December.

Cost £57-00; £52-00 Seniors; £31-00 Benefits

Please contact Judy or Alma at Braunton School on 01271813627 to book your place

Kay Thomas

IT Update on Horestone

Visitors to Horestone will have noticed that the measures to introduce improved security are now well advanced. Regular users who need access to the several sheds will have (easily remembered !) 4-digit security codes in future. We are grateful for Tony W and the Instrumented Hive Partnership for the kind donation of the system, and to a number of members who have recently helped with all the necessary installation work.

It has also been suggested many times over recent months that some sort of PC training be introduced, so that members may better derive the significant benefit from their home - or our Apiary - PC and internet access investments. This would likely be done at Horestone. If you are interested, please contact Tony W and give him your thoughts.

Generally Dave J tries to help members on a more *ad hoc* basis. He can be contacted at 01769 561 002 or dave@greenover.net.

Website of the Month - Top Bar Hive Beekeeping

<http://www2.gsu.edu/~biojdsx/main.htm>

A little departure from mainstream beekeeping this month to this fascinating site about Top Bar Hives (TBHs). The site itself has lots of interesting information on making and maintaining these hives, and also includes useful links to other sites dealing with the same subject.

I've always had a yearning to build one of these amazing hives, and maybe, one of these days, I'll get around to it.

The site also includes plans and advice on building your own hive, as well as some pictures and info on building your own honey press (no plans of the latter though). Unfortunately, the site does not seem to have been updated recently, so fresh information is sparse. However, it is well worth a visit if you have not seen it before. As ever, links to this site will be shown in the Branch's website, so you'll only be a click away.

Bitz4Bees: - A Super Xmas Gift Idea

The Community of Beekeepers ('Bitz4Bees') informs us that it has a very fine Christmas gift idea for your consideration at this time of the year. This is a new item, superior and far cheaper than that available from current sources such as Thorne. It is a refractometer, essential for checking the humidity of your honey - especially if you sell the honey. It is very well made,

has a 2 yrs guarantee, is temperature compensated over 10-30 deg C, with a range of 12-27 % water (see picture). It comes in a carry bag, with a set of useful small plastic pipettes and even includes a calibration mini-screwdriver.



Cost ? Around £27, less than half that of the less robust Thorne design;

Contact Dave Morris on 01237 475 705. This seems an ideal gift candidate for your beekeeping spouse - or yourself. If necessary, leave this copy of Northern Lights on the breakfast table near the toast and marmalade !

(Shouldn't that be honey !!!! Ed)

Missing items at the Apiary

We have another mystery to solve involving missing items at Horestone.

(By the way, the last such plea through Northern Lights successfully enabled us to quickly locate the mislaid extractor.)

This time the missing items are two identical walkie-talkie units (small black mobile handset type units) and two USB computer flash memory sticks (one silver, the other black with lanyard). Altogether these are quite valuable and belong to Kay T and Dave J. Furthermore, one of the memory units contains the only copy of a large number of treasured personal photos that belong to another member.

These four items were mislaid very recently, so please keep a lookout for them - it is possible someone has accidentally removed them from the main meeting room along with other personal belongings brought back from the Apiary.

Please contact Dave James, Kay Thomas or Tony Wright if you have any info.

Successful BBKA Negotiation on Organic Acids

After several high level meetings with the Veterinary Medical Directorate (VMD), Tim Lovatt (Chairman of BBKA) was able to reveal at the National Honey Show last month that the organic acids (Oxalic, Formic, Lactic) will be regarded as Hive Cleansers for Varroa control and not honeybee medicines.

This means that the threatened statutory controls that were to be applied from January will not now be applied. You will not need to get a prescription from a Vet. More details later.

Bees at War (part 1)

Strangely enough, despite the generally peaceful image conjured up by beekeeping, both honey and bees have been used in the past as weapons of war – both in attack and defence.

For instance, not all honeys are that benign. A few honeys (thankfully not produced in this country) are toxic to humans. For example, the honey produced from *Rhododendron Ponticum* (and there are others).

This fact was used to great effect by the Hekatometes of Asia Minor (in an area now contained with Turkey) who made great use of a “Honey Trap” They deliberately left a large amount of such toxic honey in the path of Pompey and about 1,000 Roman soldiers, who, accustomed as they were to loot and steal anything in their path, soon devoured the free food. In consequence however, they were seized by severe bouts of vomiting and diarrhoea and the attacking Hekatomete soldiers had few problems in defeating the weakened and preoccupied Roman troops.

Over the centuries, the bees themselves have also been used by armies as both a form of attack and defence.

The Romans were known to fling portable beehives into the ranks of their foes (or over walls into besieged cities) using their considerable skills with catapults.

In medieval times, several castles were designed with beehives within the walls - an unwelcome surprise for any attackers who might breach a wall at the wrong spot! Straw hives were also kept on top of city or castle walls, ready to be thrown down on besieging armies.

National Honey Show Success For North Devon Beginner

Our very own Ruth Neal entered a couple of precious jars of her first crop of honey at the National Honey Show at RAF Hendon. The Clear Run Honey Class had 19 entries and Ruth was awarded a 'Highly Commended'. Well done Ruth you have now proved yourself and will no longer be regarded as a novice.

In my stroll around the Show over the three days I spotted only a dozen visitors from Devon including four from North Devon.

Perhaps we can organize a coach load of members next year as it is located just off the M25 and well worth a visit

Apple Cake

I know it is not honey based, but I couldn't resist including this recipe. As those of you who tasted Lizzie Wilson's version some 3 weeks ago at one of the apiary's Tuesday “Gorgefests”, it is scrumptious. With acknowledgment to Mary Berry for the original recipe.

225g (8oz) SR flour
1 level teaspoon baking powder
225g (8oz) caster sugar
2 eggs
1/2 teaspoon almond essence
150g (5oz) butter, melted
350g (12oz) cooking apples, peeled and cored
25g (1oz) flaked almonds - (optional)

Grease 20cm (8inch) loose-bottomed cake tin

Put flour, baking powder, sugar, eggs, essence and melted butter into bowl and mix (I used a magimix). Spread 1/2 mixture in tin. Put thickly sliced (or chopped) apples on top of mixture. Spread rest of mixture on top (using two spoons). Sprinkle almonds if desired.

Cook at 160C/325F/Gas 3 for 1½ hours until golden.

(My version didn't turn out as well as Lizzie's, but it was still pretty good! Must try replacing sugar with honey sometime. Ed.)

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All contributions welcome, copy by 19th of month for publication in following month's newsletter.

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