



Editorial :

To Seal or not to Seal, that is the Question.

One of the potential pitfalls of harvesting your honey crop is the age old question of how long do you wait before extracting the crop (ie when is the honey ripe). The perceived wisdom is to wait until most of the comb is sealed – but what happens if your particular colony appears to shun this easy solution. Two of my colonies (at the same apiary) seem to be reluctant to seal certain frames, and in one particular hive have provided 2 frames, perfectly sealed on one side and completely unsealed (but full) on the other. Shaking does not appear to dislodge the unsealed honey, so presumably it is ripe, so why have they made no attempt to seal it ?

(Incidentally, before you smugly point out a possible reason, the 2 frames concerned are not at the outside of the super !)

This prompted me to consider whether other factors might affect the sealing of comb. The first of course might be characteristics of the bee colony itself – some strains may be more inclined to seal comb earlier than others (presumably a desirable trait for a beekeeper biased towards honey production). This would however not really explain my “asymmetric” frames.

So, onto a more unsubstantiated theory. Is it possible that the bees themselves determine which stores are “laid down” for the winter and which are left available for short-term consumption. After all, it is pointless expending resources and energy sealing cells, if you are shortly going to open them up again.

I have absolutely no evidence for this theory, but merely put it forward as one possible explanation.

If anybody has any other explanations or views on the above, I would be pleased to hear them. In the meantime has anybody got a refractometer, going cheap ?

Kevin Tricker

Chairman's Letter:

This month, I'll go over the basic principles of cleaning honey for sale or to give away. Show presentation is a different procedure which I don't intend to look at, nor will I be dealing with preparation of cut comb at this time.

Having removed the supers, with full sealed frames in them, most of us need to store them for a while before extracting. Just stand them on an upturned roof or crown board (no feedholes) and place the roof or board on top. I tape up the seams with duck tape, or similar, which prevents robbing.

The place chosen for storage should be warm (for easy extraction) but not too hot as this produces Hydroxy Methyl Furfuraldehyde (HMF) which is to be avoided* - around 25degrees Centigrade is fine.

At this point we should remember that the highest water content it should have is 21%, unless it is heather or clover honey when the limit is 23%. Honey with a water content above these limits will ferment unless boiled which, of course, totally ruins the flavour and negates the health benefits.

When honey is processed, hygiene is vital and if you sell honey you can be inspected by Environmental Health and/or Trading Standard officers.

Having extracted the honey, usually by spinning, it needs to be cleaned. This is normally done by letting it drain through strainers which remove lumps of wax, propolis, bee parts etc. These strainers should be food grade plastic, stainless steel or food grade fabric. Normally the strainers are used in pairs, the initial strainer having a mesh of 1.5mm and then a second finer strainer of 0.8mm. There are fabric strainers which go down to 500 or even 200 microns. A mesh of 200 microns (1/5 of a millimetre) will remove anything larger than a single pollen grain.

To be technically classified as "filtered" honey, a mesh size of 30 microns is needed, which removes all pollen grains.

Take care,

Chris

REMEMBER !!
Visit to Quince Honey
Farm. Monday 11th
September 7pm. More
details on Page 2.

Apiary Managers Report

On Wednesday 19th of July, seven of our aspiring beekeepers were undergoing their Basic Beekeeping exam at Horestone when, during Flower's manipulation of a colony in the honey producing section, the examiner noticed that two of the larvae on one frame of brood were not curled in the bottom of the cell but were looking somewhat distressed.

Glyn Davies thought this might be an early sign of the dreaded European Foulbrood (EFB). The rest of the colony was carefully scrutinised and no other abnormalities were found.

Through the wonders of the computer communication capabilities at the apiary, I was informed within minutes of the find.

I contacted Peter Auger and we decided that he would do a full inspection of all the colonies and the apiary generally on Monday 24th July. On the day, all the section heads were present together with Chris Tozer and yours truly.

It was the first time I had seen Peter inspecting. I was amazed, the day was far too hot to be wearing a bee suit but he just went through colony after colony looking carefully at every frame of brood, in over forty boxes of bees, including the nuclei and the apideas. He finished by doing a general inspection of the site, sheds, honey processing facilities, storage of wax etc etc and on this occasion we were granted a clean bill of health.

We still cannot be complacent about apiary hygiene, and I promise that you will be hearing much more on this important topic over the winter period to prepare us for the new season.

Tony

Turn of the Season

Along with your Northern Lights this month comes the usual DBKA magazine "Beekeeping", the Branch diary of forthcoming events over the next six months, and also the schedule for our Branch Honey Show at the end of October. There is a lot to get your head around, and all of it is, I hope you will find, exciting and interesting, even challenging. Putting together a Winter Programme was a lot of fun. I have tried to make it varied and informative, and I hope you enjoy every event on the list.

First, for September, comes a visit to Quince Honey Farm. This is from 7.00pm on Monday 11th September. The visit kicks off with a Talk by Paddy Wallace about how he handles 1,500 colonies and the subsequent crops, then we wander around the amazing dis-

plays, finally comes a cup of tea and a biscuit. Paddy likes a decent donation to his Charity CLIC, eg £3 per person.

A Wax Handling Course will be held at Jenny Buckle's house near Ashburton. Still two places left at £10 for the day. Go for it. It's a great day out on Saturday 16th

The final 2006 Open Day at Horestone Apiary is on Sunday 17th. If it is half as good as the August Open Day, it will still be a knockout. Be like the Brownies and Lend a Hand, please.

Our Winter series of Talks at the Castle Centre launches at 7.30pm on Friday 22nd, given by Brian Gant, who is an expert on Methods of Varroa Control. Shared supper, raffle etc (more about raffles later)

Now! That Show Schedule. It is much the same as the schedule Kevin Tricker and I got off the ground last year. Read it through, and decide which classes you are going to enter. Then get your entry form in, with the fees, by 16th October. You can begin by setting aside one or two of your best frames, your best wax, and your best honey, for the exciting procedures of preparation. Let's make it the best Honey Show ever.

If you would like to sponsor one of the classes at £6, that would be a great help to us. If you are feeling VERY generous, you may wish to donate a trophy in your name. The one remaining class for which there is no trophy is the Photography Class. Contact Ruth Neal.

Beryl

Serious Advert !!

At the next AGM the following club officers will be standing down:

Vice Chairman	Treasurer
Social Secretary	Membership Secretary
Microscopist	Newsletter Editor
Shows Sub-Committee Chairman	

All of these roles need to be filled but beekeeping expertise is not a requirement - just enthusiasm.

The present officers will, of course, be on hand or at the end of a phone to offer advice as needed and the committee will be more than willing to help.

Please contact the present office holder or me if you're at all interested and we can have a chat about what is involved. A phone call does not commit you to anything! Be reassured that you would be fully supported in the job.

Chris Tozer

Hive Preservative

As all members will know, the only wood preservative regarded as safe to use on the inside of hives has been Cuprinol's clear one. But Cuprinol has, over a somewhat unclear timescale, made "substantial changes" to the formulation. You may have seen this mentioned in the current issue of BeeCraft, for there is concern that the product as sold today may not be so safe.

We, together with Bitz4Bees, are in direct contact with ICI's scientist responsible for sponsoring the re-assessment work being undertaken within the CSL on the issue, and will let members know when this NBU work is finished, currently scheduled for October. In fact, it would appear that the clear guidance offered by DBKA in the past for the previous formulation, reflected a slightly higher view of the product safety than ICI's own assessment. BBKA has in any case withdrawn advisory note no. 7 on the subject.

Dave James

Rosemoor Family Weekend

Rosemoor Family Weekend was a relatively relaxed affair in a gorgeous setting. Our Branch was given the gazebo on the lawns of the Winter Garden. It was anything but wintry, the heat brought out satisfying numbers of families, nearly all interested in our honey, Chris Utting's bees, Brian Marchant's microscopes, and our leaflets of information.

Through the gardens flitted a couple of green wraiths, ever so graceful they were, and odd characters from Alice in Wonderland.



Some of the Odd Characters from Wonderland ?

We sold lots of honey - 300 lb I heard, and much wax and honey fudge. It was quite difficult to keep our merchandise out of the hot sun, which seemed to swing round much faster than expected.

Thanks to a willing team

Beryl

Still using Apistan and/or Bayvarol for varroa control ?

This is a not-so-gentle reminder to those Branch members who are still using Apistan or Bayvarol treatments for *varroa destructor*. Or, more likely, to friends or contacts of members who may not belong to any such beekeeping association and may not keep up to date with developments. We remind members that we live, of course, in an area where there is undoubtedly resistance to pyrethroids - in fact this has been so for 5 years now.

Of course all members will be carefully employing their own IPM approach, tailored to their own circumstances. But are all your local beekeepers on top of the control measures ? You, of course, take a responsible attitude to the need for proper IPM measures, so you'd expect others to do so, too, wouldn't you ?

It has come to our attention that Mole Valley Farmers have been happily selling Bayvarol locally to beekeepers without awareness by either side of the pyrethroid resistance issue. We are working with MVF to better apprise them of the information that is readily available. Please do your part in informing others who may not be so well informed. There is plenty of excellent, free information available from the CSL, or you can seek advice from experienced Branch members, or our very own ever-helpful RBI, Peter Auger.

You can get miticides and resistance test kits from Bitz4Bees - with good advice - and at best prices, too. HiveClean is available in the UK only from this source currently.

Also make a note in your diary for Friday Sep 22 at the Castle Centre, Barnstaple for a talk by Brian Gant on methods of *varroa* control.

Dave James

Record Breaking North Devon Show

I have been attending this Show for more years than I like to remember and I have never seen so many members of the public. There were thousands and thousands of them - and they kept coming. At 5.00 pm when the Food Hall attendance was normally dwindling, we were packed solid.

Dave and Jean Morris took over £800 in sales. Our two observation hives were peered at constantly by young and old. The sunny weather was good, but it was very windy at times and we were concerned that the observation hive flight tube was shaking about. It did hold together - that is until one little darling decided to yank the whole hive away from the marquee wall. A couple of seconds panic but all was restored and the bees hardly noticed.

There was a lot of interest from people wanting to start up beekeeping and details of the Sunday Open Days and the Winter evening class.

Ruth Neal and Kevin Tricker gave excellent talks on the craft that were well received in the Flower Hall.

Well done to the small team that managed our stall.

Chris Utting

“Meet the Bees” Open Day

As I denuded the chicken at 9-30, it was raining. By 10-30, as I arranged the sandwiches on the plate, the wind was blowing apples off the trees so, as I departed at 11-30, I took a fleece and a shower proof.

Guests arrived in dribs and drabs from noon to 2pm, when David James, our Vice Chairman, opened the meeting. By 2-15pm, there were about 40 people present, the temperature soared and the appropriate gear would have been Sunglasses and Bikini.

The General Public were taken by Chris and Beryl and spent the most wonderful and informative afternoon dressing up in bee suits then being shown a colony of bees and actually handling a frame, they must have been bowled over by the experience.

The other group, experienced beekeepers from Cornwall, were more interested in the formality of the Apiary. Kevin Stach and David informed of its recent history, general organization, the workload and sharing it, money raising and spending it, and

finally what the committee hoped might be possible for the future. We escorted them round the site, they looked at anything and everything taking photographs and asking question as they went. At the instrumented, hive some showed an understanding of the electronics, some of the sounds emitting from colonies and some of the problems of making opening nucs. Knowledgeable questions here. All were interested in the Honey House and the extracting set-up, this was where most photographs were taken.



When everyone returned to the shed, Ruth Neal gave a competent summery of the extracting system which she adopts and the whole event was rounded off by the usual sumptuous Afternoon Tea. Northern Branch is well known for its innovative beekeeping, but our hospitality is par excellence.

Many, many thanks to everyone who helped in any way towards this

The afternoon cost a lot, both in man hours and money, but it was all well spent.

Kay Thomas

A Collection of Beekeepers

Given that the one sure thing about a collection of beekeepers is that they will never agree on anything to do with beekeeping, Dave James and I were musing the other day on a suitable collective noun for beekeepers. How about the following ?

A Discord of Beekeepers

A Disagreement of Beekeepers

A Dichotomy of Beekeepers

An Argument of Beekeepers

Any other suggestions ?

Editor

Bee - licious !!

"Bees are consumed by the Congolese, rural Thais, Laotians, and American Indians. Some German children in Lower Saxony also eat honey bees. These insects are commonly consumed as bee brood - a mix of bee larvae and pupae.

When bee brood is baked, fried, or deep-fried, it becomes dry and flaky like a breakfast cereal.

Deep-fried bees can taste nutty or caramelized, and they have been compared with sunflower seeds, shrimp, walnuts, Rice Krispies, or pork cracklings.

Chocolate-covered bees and bees in syrup are considered a gourmet item in Mexico. These products are also canned for export."

from "The Insect Zoo" part of the National Museum of Natural History.

(www.insectzoo.msstate.edu/)

Community of Beekeepers Ltd (Bitz4Bees) announces Logo Competition Winner

The board of Community of Beekeepers in August announced the winner of its competition for a worthy logo for all company correspondence, documents, flyers etc. There were some extremely good designs submitted, and the winning entry was one submitted by Tim Potter. Congratulations, Tim !

Readers will recall that this competition was held in association with the recent solicitation for a modest increase in ordinary share capital.

Some £800 was raised and the new ordinary shareholders, together with the original cumulative, convertible preferred shareholders, will be receiving their share certificates soon - proudly carrying the new logo, of course.

Thanks to all who subscribed for shares. The extra working capital will help assure continuing success for the company, which has had a very successful first trading year so far.

Tim gets £25 in shares and a Bitz4Bees credit voucher worth £25.

(See the front page of this newsletter, top right hand box, for the new logo.)

Website of the Month - Bee Biology

www.uni.uiuc.edu/~stone2/bee_overview.html

This is a University of Illinois educational website which has a lot of general biological information about the honeybee.

Once again, whilst the general content of this site may be of interest for most of us, it is the outstanding pictures that draw me to this site. There are too many excellent photos to highlight all of them, but the section of diseases is particularly useful – check out the pictures of EFB and AFB under “Parasites and Competitors”. The whole site however is worth a browse – it is not that large.

If you are lazy (or a poor typist !), follow the link from our own website, shown on the “For Members” page, or the “Newsletter” page.

Pest out West

(And you thought WE had problems with overwintering mice !)

“The **Striped Skunk** is widely distributed throughout the United States, easily recognized, and hard to forget. Opportunistic omnivores, skunks can find a meal anywhere.

The apiary offers skunks a bountiful feast. One skunk can decimate the entire population of a hive in as little as three nights. Scratching at the entrance, the animal alerts the guard bees to a disturbance at the door. As they respond to protect the hive, the skunk quickly devours the workers. As more bees emerge, they too are consumed. Satiated, the skunk will waddle away to sleep off its delectable meal and return the following evening.

This behaviour will continue until the hive is vacant. If it finds any way to access the hive, the wax, pollen, and honey would also be eaten.

Fencing can minimize skunk problems. One-inch poultry netting is effective. Bury the lower 12" extending 6" below the ground with 6" bent outward in an "L" shape. Where fencing is impractical, beehives can be elevated three feet above the ground level. A smooth sheet of metal at the base makes the elevated hive inaccessible to the skunk.”

Extract from an article in the UBA Spring 2001 Newsletter

Creating Your Own Creamed Honey

Extracted from an article in the NZ Beekeeper, in 1987.

Have you ended up some years with jars of honey granulated so hard that you couldn't even get a knife into it? Honey so hard, it tore the bread every time you tried to spread it? Honey with gritty bits of sugar crystals in it? It's still honey, of course. Nothing really wrong with it, other than inconvenience and the chance of putting some people off honey forever!

The 'creamed honey' sold in New Zealand would have to be the source of the most often repeated myth about honey. No foreign materials have been added to honey to make it granulate smoothly. No icing sugar, white sugar, flour, cream or lard (yes, I have been told that's what beekeepers add to their honey!) or any other such things.

There is no reason at all that you, as a hobbyist beekeeper, should not have a go at making your own creamed honey, rather than simply rely on good luck to get a smoothly granulated honey. Though the results might be somewhat variable, you'll have a good time learning a little more about your hobby.

Creaming honey is simply controlling the natural crystallization process. Almost all honeys will eventually naturally granulate, most within a few months while others remain liquid for longer. In England, such naturally granulated honeys are called 'set honey'.

The speed and the texture that the honey granulates is mostly a product of the ratio of the two main sugars of honey, dextrose and levulose. If a honey has a high dextrose to levulose ratio, it will granulate rapidly with a fine crystal. If it has a high levulose content, it will granulate slowly and often with crystals large enough that you can feel their sharpness on your tongue.

To 'cream' honey, the beekeeper mixes in a percentage of honey that has already granulated finely. This honey is called a 'starter', since its crystal structure will start the liquid honey to granulate in the same manner. In order to speed up the granulation, the starter needs to be thoroughly mixed with the liquid honey, and then the container needs to be kept cool. Not cold, not refrigerator style cold, but simply cool. The ideal temperature is about 14 degrees Celsius (57 degrees Fahrenheit).

Keeping the honey at this temperature causes it to granulate as rapidly as possible, and since it has already got a nice grain started, the entire volume will granulate the same as the starter you introduced. It

should be stirred occasionally during the process. Once the granulation is well established, the now cloudy looking honey can be run into its final containers. Again, it should be kept cool to assist rapid granulation.

In practical terms, you begin the process by finding some finely granulated honey. This might be some from last season that you have kept back or you could even buy it from another beekeeper or a shop. (*Make sure that it is Devon honey though - Ed.*) I like to add as much as possible, even up to 6 kg or so for a Polypail of honey, but you probably don't really need this much. If you like, you can start out with a small amount of starter and bulk it up by carrying out the process twice.

Stir the starter honey thoroughly into the liquid honey. It won't be easy, but you need to completely spread the granulated honey through the liquid. Afterward, keep it cool by placing your bulk container (well covered, of course) in a cool room.

Stir it several times over the next week. It should start clouding, as the granulation spreads rapidly through the honey. You can now run it into the containers in which you will be distributing it, and again, keep them cool. The honey should be nicely creamed, set with a fine, smooth grain, within a week or two.

Credit for the 'scientific' approach to creamed honey goes to an American, a Dr Dyce who was a beekeeping professor at Cornell University. He described a complex and detailed method to produce creamed honey that differs little from the basic description given above. He did meticulously give temperatures and amounts, such as the ideal temperature to heat the honey before adding the starter, to make sure there were no natural crystals present in it.

(I've always felt that we as Kiwi beekeepers never really got all the credit we really deserved. The way I understand it, Dr Dyce visited New Zealand and saw the process in action several years earlier!)

As I mentioned, your results may be somewhat variable. It's possible that, even after following all the directions, your honey might still set hard as a rock. Doing it as a hobbyist as you are, you can't control all the factors involved, but the odds are that you'll produce a better product than just trusting to natural granulation.

If you get really interested in the process, you might care to read further on what is quite a specialized subject.

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