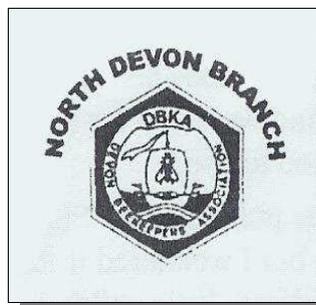


NORTHERN LIGHTS

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



April 2007

www.northdevonbees.org

Editorial

Someone asked me if I wanted my head examined when I suggested that I take over as Newsletter Editor! Yet here I am putting pen to paper for the first time. On your behalf, sincere thanks go to Kevin for his hard work in producing the Newsletter in recent months; no mean feat and we are all most grateful for his efforts. Kevin, thank you very much - now you have more time for all those other pursuits!

Congratulations are due this month to one of our longest-serving and hardest-working members - Beryl Smailes - who has been awarded the coveted Downing Bowl from the DBKA for her outstanding contributions to beekeeping over many years. The presentation was made by Dr Mick Street, President, at the DBKA President's Day on the 17th March; a photograph of the presentation appears on Page 2.

Apiary Car Parking - once again it is necessary to draw to your attention the very limited parking at the Apiary. Unfortunately, this week we had a very awkward situation when the occupier of one of the cottages was blocked in and was justifiably very irate. This is unforgivable on our part. If you are late arriving, please check to see if anyone is parking in the field opposite the gateway. If they are, then join them! If you are able to car-share with a pal, please do. So, in any event, please do NOT block the egress of our neighbours. If they complain to the landlord, it could have very nasty repercussions.

The article on 'Sex, Drugs & Rock n' Roll' or 'Colony Collapse Disorder' has been edited to make it fit the space available, but May Berenbaum's paper makes for interesting reading.

The Library assets will shortly be moved to Horestone, for which suitable (and free) cabinets have already been installed.
Ed.

Honey & Healing

It's from some Alaskan beekeepers site. "Interesting story about honey and healing. My mare skinned her hock. We put honey directly on it, twice a day for two days. It healed up very fast and didn't even scab over like you'd have thought it would. Last year, I had occasion to try honey healing on (1) my husband (dog bitten finger and he refused to seek medical treatment, but let me treat him with honey on the wound), then (2) a head wound on a large old dog (some type of infection that broke open, leaving a nasty open wound). Both healed up in record time. I keep saying that we need to put some honey in a small container and carry it along when on trail rides as first aid for the horses, and for us".
Ma. .. North Pacific Coast .. South of the Alaska Border

Take Care and Stay Lucky
Albert Cannon

New Labels

As you probably know, we have finally run out of our present labels and it seems a good time to have a change. Consequently, I have taken advice from the Devon Trading Standards officer, and the Apiary will shortly be having a new look label reflecting, I hope, our commitment to all things good from both traditional and modern points of view. The new labels will be black text on a white background showing a stylised bee, and the finish will be glossy on top quality paper. The look is clear, clean and stylish. There will also be a companion label for sale to members who do not wish to use their own personal label, which has slightly different wording. Members will be legally required to add a small label stating address and 'best before' date. The labels should be ready by the end of April. I hope you will like them.

Ruth Neal

Dates for Your Diary

Bitz4Bees AGM

17th April; 4:30 pm; at the Apiary

Somerset BKA Special Lecture
Sparkford; Wed 18th April

BBKA Spring Convention

Stoneleigh-Park, Warwickshire
Members' Day - Fri 20th April
Convention - Sat 21st April

Branch Skittles Evening

Bickington; Sat 12th May

'Go Wild in the Garden'

Rosemoor; Sat 28th April

IT Corner 1

Starting mid-March the first issue of *The Messenger* was sent to all known e-mail addressees. This is a no-cost alert mailer to remind members over forthcoming events, vain pleas for help & the like. If you don't get this already, just supply your e-mail address & it will be sent to you.

Dave James

Picture Puzzle from Last Month

Remember the intriguing item shown in last month's issue? Well, Tony Wright reports that there was no correct answer from the entries submitted, so he has decided that the prize - one of those handy little credit-card size Fresnel magnifiers from Bitz4Bees - should go to the member who owns the fine mahogany gadget. That is to say, John Hoyles. What is it? It's a beautifully made sort of beekeeper's valet, so to speak. John suffered a stroke some while ago and finds it difficult now to juggle nails, nail-pusher and so on, all at once when assembling his frames. He mentioned this and Dave Morris promptly made a handy little prototype first which seemed to be along the right lines. Then Tony Wright produced the fine mahogany version, which John has been extremely pleased with. The tray at the front normally carries the nails, not John's loose change, of course! Oh, and although John is frustratingly not currently allowed to drive to Horestone on Tuesdays, it seems we shall see him regularly enough, as Kay Thomas and Peter Warrilow between them generously ensure he has a lift so he can keep involved. So a welcome double dose of generosity from our members, and John has told me how much he truly appreciates such kindness.

Dave James



**John's
Bee-
keeper's
Valet**

Horestone Hilton Update

As indicated in last month's issue, we need volunteers - urgently now! Most of the timber has arrived, also the scalplings. The roof sheets and other items will have arrived by the time this newsletter is out. Chris Tozer has started to trim the offending tree at one end of the main shed. Anyone willing to help please contact Tony Wright or Dave James. For regular visitors to Horestone, please note that we are replacing the conventional padlocks with combination locks on the Quartermaster's Stores and the Honey Shed. These are easy to use types, same combination number as the main shed, and obviate the need to keep track of keys.

Dave James

IHP Request for Help: Feral Colonies

The Instrumented Hive Partnership (IHP) appeals for help for the forthcoming season. One of the IHP's areas of interest concerns the details of comb building in feral and 'newly feral' colonies. The IHP last year made a start in collecting feral colony comb assemblies, and in photographing them and categorising the comb characteristics. This is not the place to go into the full details, but in essence what the IHP seeks help on is:

- identifying the sites of truly feral colonies in the North Devon area
- gaining visual and photographic access to 'newly feral' colonies

The latter could be swarms that have taken up residence in an unused/discarded brood chamber in an apiary, or perhaps in a bait hive, or in some other natural or man-made cavity of some sort. The IHP will again conduct experiments with special, circularly symmetric hives for housing newly swarmed colonies collected in timely fashion, but the IHP is keen to get a decent statistical base for such measurements and observations. The main thrust is to examine better the comb building when the colony is in a more 'natural' situation, ie, not installed in a conventional manner into a moveable frame arrangement that is strongly influenced by the beekeeper. Any beekeeper who has the opportunity to help will be rewarded for their trouble by the (modest!) supply of bottles of the very finest local cider. So, please, keep this item handy and contact the IHP if you can help at any time this season:

01769-561002 or 01271-865516

or e-mail instrumented-hive@tiscali.co.uk

Michael Duncan, Dave James, Tony Wright



**Beryl
Smailes
& Mick
Street**

Latest News from B4B

As the busy season approaches we await your orders for new equipment you cannot do without, and replacements for worn out 'bits and pieces'. B4B will do its best to fill your orders on time and at reasonable prices. If you have any queries, please contact us. From April the shop will be open on **Tuesdays from 12 Noon until 1 pm** - to help those of you who cannot get to the Apiary; the shop will also be open after the Apiary meeting *on request*.

Dave & Jean Morris

The North Devon Journal in mid-March carried this little article on CoB, with the expected level of puns for such a topic!

Busy Beekeepers find their Business is a Hive of Activity

The first dandelions of the year are appearing in fields and hedgerows, and that means only one thing to followers of a traditional pastime. "Once the dandelions are blooming, and the bees are getting pollen, it's a wake-up call to beekeepers," said Tony Wright, a member of the North Devon Branch of the Devon Beekeepers Association. To help bees on their way, Tony and three other Branch members have set up a ground-breaking project. Bitz4Bees is the trade-name of the Community of Beekeepers, a not-for-profit business selling equipment direct to beekeepers. The idea is simple but since it was launched a year ago it has taken North Devon by storm, producing a staggering £20,000 turnover. They supplied 6,000 jars to honey-makers this year, as well as unusual items, such as Austrian hive cleaning products and even fondant icing to feed bees in winter. Beekeepers Dave James, Jean and Dave Morris, and Tony Wright operate from a shipping container behind a house near Umberleigh. By working as a group they get big discounts on expensive equipment. Friends buy through them and the profits are ploughed back into the Association and its offshoots. As well as helping beekeepers, Bitz4Bees has spawned interesting side-lines, including a surge in demand for hand-made bee-hives. The group has started to make more items to order through "Father Christmas' Woodworking Workshop" in Combe Martin. Tony said: "Father Christmas is Michael Duncan, who helps us make the equipment to sell - but everyone says he looks like Father Christmas. He's in his 80s, but is very sprightly." Tony added: "Bitz4Bees started in a haphazard way, but the goal is simple, to provide beekeepers with equipment to buy at reasonable prices." Dave said the group is run as a community interest company, which does not exist to make money. In the long term, profits go back to the Branch. Dave said they were very grateful to landlord John Seage, who lets them use his land for their container. Jean said: "It's very hard work, everyone has to be very dedicated - Bitz4Bees has even taken over my bedside reading." The business supplies any beekeeper, not just members, and even had a surprise order from a convert to beekeeping in Cyprus. Tony said: "It was sheer fluke. It was someone who started after wild bees invaded his house. He wanted the 'phone number of our supplier up north and I said we could beat their prices."

We understand that in the near future the same paper plans to write further articles on the Branch and on the Instrumented Hive Partnership (IHP).

Dave James

DBKA President's Day

In the early days, I used to think that President's Day must be some fearfully remote and elevated occasion which was very far from my own level of beekeeping or participation. Not a bit of it. President's Day is a great day out for a Devon beekeeper, with lots of friendly beekeepers to meet - many of them old friends - an interesting lecture, and the DBKA AGM. The current President is Dr Mick Street and this year he turned round his arrangements very successfully. Instead of the expensive, unfriendly Peter Chalk Building at Exeter University, the meeting was held at the ISCA Centre in Whipton. The building is light and modern with a bar and inexpensive, fresh catering. It has a vast Indoor Bowling Centre alongside the Bridge Suite where we met. "Isca", I learned, was the Roman name for Exeter.

First, was the arrival of beekeepers with items for the auction which was to be held in the afternoon. After the free coffee break, the President welcomed members and introduced our Regional Bee Inspector Adam VEVERS. Adam spoke of his time in California working on a very extensive bee farm in the almond orchards of the San Fernando Valley. Here he learned queen rearing on a scale of thousands. There followed a time in New Zealand's South Island, queen rearing on a smaller scale and very different approach. Finally, he explained his method of supplying his own queens for his own apiary in South Devon. Adam uses the Cloake method, and I really believe our Horestone Apiary team could apply this with some modification to include the Miller way of raising the queen cells. A Cloake board is simply a queen excluder with groove for a sliding board under the slots. The design is quite available and very easy for our ace carpenter to produce. Our other ace, Kay Thomas, is eager to try it out. So watch the space. For selection, Adam recommended us to look for disease resistant strains; local bees over-winter better. Don't import queens from another country, always work with nature.

Next, Mick took the meeting through the agenda with Chris Utting standing in as General Secretary. He received reports, presented Education Certificates, and presented the beautifully made skeps to the two Basic Beekeeping students with highest marks. After lunch further discussion was held plus the Election of Officers. Then he conducted the auction - with help on the transaction recording side from Roger Lacey, and that was more or less the end of the day. I have to hand it to Mick - he worked so hard and so well planned was the programme, it was enjoyed by all. Please come next year!

Beryl Smailes

IT Corner 2

Tony Wright was trying to organise an IT course to help members get more 'beekeeping mileage' out of their PCs, but there seems little interest in this, so this will likely not be done now.

Dave James

Sex, Bugs & Rock'n'Roll

May R. Berenbaum, head of the department of entomology at the University of Illinois, is the author of "Buzzwords: A Scientist Muses on Sex, Bugs and Rock 'n' Roll."

When Hollywood filmmakers want to heighten the tension of an insect fear film, they just arrange for millions of killer bees to appear out of nowhere to threaten a vulnerable group of people. But people across the country are facing a much more frightening real-life situation: the disappearance of millions of bees. This winter, in more than 20 States beekeepers have noticed that their honeybees have mysteriously vanished, leaving behind no clues as to their whereabouts. There are no tell-tale dead bodies either inside colonies or out in front of hives, where bees typically deposit corpses of dead nestmates. What's more, the afflicted colonies tend to be full of honey, pollen and larvae, as if all of the workers in the nest precipitously decamped on some prearranged signal. Beekeepers are up in arms - last month leaders in the business met with research scientists and government officials in Florida to figure out why the bees are disappearing and how to stop the losses. Nobody had any answers. That beekeepers are alarmed is understandable, but, just as in the movies, the public may not recognize the magnitude of the threat that these mysterious events present.

A decline in the numbers of honey bees doesn't just mean a shortage of honey for toast and tea. In fact, the economic value of honey, wax & other bee products is trivial in comparison with the honey bee's service as a pollinator. More than 90 crops in North America rely on honey bees to transport pollen from flower to flower, effecting fertilization and allowing production of fruit and seed. Approximately one-third of the typical American's diet (primarily the healthiest part!) is directly or indirectly the result of honey bee pollination. Production of almonds in California, a \$2 billion enterprise, is almost entirely dependent on honey bees. Every year beekeepers transport millions of bees around the country to meet the ever-growing need for pollination services for almonds, apples, blueberries, peaches and other crops. This year it is possible that there won't be enough bees to meet the demand for pollinators. Theories abound as to potential causes of what is being called **colony collapse disorder**. As a social species living in close quarters at high densities, honey bees are prone to a staggering diversity of fungal, bacterial and viral diseases. In the 1980s, honey bee numbers plummeted when two species of parasitic mites appeared, wiping out most populations of wild bees and placing more pressure on managed colonies. This latest drop in numbers may be the consequence of a new infection, or of several diseases simultaneously, leading to a fatally compromised immune system.

It is also possible that severe stress brought on by crowding, inadequate nutrition, or even the combined effects of prophylactic antibiotics and miticides sprayed by beekeepers to ward off infections may be a factor. Another, particularly sad, possibility is that accidental exposure to a new pesticide may cause non-lethal behavioural changes that interfere with the ability of honey bees to orient and navigate. Brain-damaged foraging bees may simply get lost on their way home and starve to death away from the hive. Irrespective of its causes, however, this drop comes at a critical time, with demand for pollination services rocketing upward. Even in a high-tech age when the human capacity to improve upon nature seems limitless, there is no satisfactory substitute for the honeybee. Thus it's astonishing that beekeeping remains largely unimproved by technological advances relative to just about every other form of animal husbandry. Last October, an international consortium of scientists announced the publication of the sequence of the entire honey bee genome. Among the benefits of knowing the full gene inventory is that it has allowed the construction of a whole-genome micro-array - a microscope slide dotted with genetic material - at the University of Illinois.

Micro-array analysis is a powerful tool for examining differences among a very large number of genes rapidly and efficiently, and it is the basis for new diagnostic tools. For bees, micro-array analysis of differences between healthy and afflicted bees may reveal the causes and provide insights for developing a cure. The real key to dealing with colony collapse disorder, however, is understanding the extent of the problem, which may prove to be more of a challenge than figuring out its origins. Americans do not keep track of pollinators, even the one on which much of our agriculture depends. No current survey monitors colony health or variability in bee numbers over the season, a critical variable for assessing population dynamics as well as economic effects of fluctuations. We need long-term monitoring of feral honey bees along with other pollinators if we are to understand the true magnitude of pollination services essential for a healthy agricultural economy. Yet honey bees which contribute to our food chain in many more ways than any other animal species (and whose pollination makes available the alfalfa and clover processed into hay to feed beef and dairy cattle), are disappearing without a trace at a rate we can't even measure accurately. Such obliviousness with respect to a precious resource in crisis might play well in a bad science fiction movie, but it's truly alarming to see it in real life.

For those interested in our own Branch discussion forum, please note that this is the 'horestoneapiary' group on Yahoo!

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