

NORTHERN LIGHTS

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

APRIL 2013

www.northdevonbees.org



Winter talks

On 14th march we had our last of our four winter talks.

David Charles came from Somerset to talk on 'Bees and the changing environment'. We had a wonderful two hour talk and all the 30 people who attended would have been happy to sit for another two hours. His information and easy delivery accompanied with very good photos was most interesting. Although retired, he has promised to come again and give a different talk.

The talks have been very well attended this year and everyone has said how varied and interesting the talks have been. The car park at the back of Marks and Spencer is free after six; and we only ask for £2 to help cover costs. This all makes a very good evening out. If you have not yet joined us, why not come and enjoy a very good evening. Tea, coffee, cake and a good chat all thrown in for free.

I wish to thank, on behalf of us all, the team that organises these talks for us: Chris Utting, Kay Thomas, Julie Elkin and Martin Pollock. They have said that they will do it all again for this winter so we can look forward to another four talks starting at the end of this year.

Barbara

Events

6 Apr **Cancelled** Nosema Clinic,
Castle Centre.

AST and Committee Reports

I am pleased to report that the AST (apiary support team) and the Committee have both had meetings in March and progress in all departments is good.

The same cannot be said about the bees. Despite the fact that we spent a lot of money giving Ambrosia as a winter feed, we have already lost four hives. This has been put down to the very bad weather last year, leading to weak colonies and poorly mated queens going into the winter.

We have a maintenance plan for the upkeep of the apiary and this is going well. We will have two work Sundays as we did last year, so I hope you all come to help. The dates will be in a future NL and, as you can see from the list below, we did a lot but still have lots more to finish.

Maintenance finished in 2012:

All the hives were put on solid slabs bedded on sand and plastic.

Honey shed reroofed.

Honey shed outside painted.

Honey shed windows maintained.

Quartermaster's store painted.

Maintenance for 2013:

To make the paths safer.

Replace the water tank behind the Quartermaster's store.

Finish maintenance on the garden shed.

Redo the kitchen area in the club house.

Work on our gardens is an on-going thing. Some areas have been seeded to grow wild, but there is a lot of land that has to be tended to.

We have enough funds to purchase forks, spades and rakes; so the gardening crew no longer have to drag their own equipment back and forth, only bring their own hand tools.

If anyone has garden equipment surplus to requirements please pass it to us, we will be happy to put it to good use. We have been lucky enough to have been donated a mulching mower and Cliff has renovated the old one. All we need now is some good weather to use it in.

Barbara



York Talk: *The different flavours of honey*

Since being exiled to York, I went to a talk hosted by York Beekeepers and thought that members might like to hear about it . . .

Little did Elizabeth Gowing know when she moved to Kosovo six years ago with her partner, Rob, that she was about to become a beekeeper. But as a birthday present Rob gave her jar of honey saying that it was from *her* bees: the main part of the present being a colony of bees. Adam was a local bee keeper and her hive was part of his apiary. Not only did she learn about bee keeping from Adam and many other beekeepers, but also about the culture, history and natural beauty of Kosovo. She also learnt about Kosovo cuisine from his wife. In her first year she extracted five jars of honey and, as with the rest of us novice bee keepers, they were the most precious and delicious. So from these experiences she wrote her first book, 'Travels in Blood and Honey'. The title reflects not only the turbulent history of Kosovo both recent and in the distant past but also the beautiful countryside and delicious recipes based around locally grown food.

The second part of Elizabeth's talk centred on her second book, 'The Little Book of Honey'. The first half of the book contains the stories and tasting notes of some extraordinary honeys from around the world. There's details of honey from avocado flowers, 'vintage' honey from 1991, the honey produced in an innovative poverty-relief programme in Nigeria through Bees Abroad, Kosovan honey and Lizard peninsular ivy honey which tastes 'alarmingly like Stilton'. The second half of the book has honey recipes from Ethiopia, France, Russia, New Zealand, Yemen and beyond - including breads and cakes, drinks and vinaigrette.

We then had a tasting session with four very different honeys. The strangest was one with 1% propolis which was reminiscent of a good old fashioned cough medicine. The most interesting was lavender honey with a hint of truffle oil from Philadelphia.

We then had a question and answer session about beekeeping in Kosovo. Most beekeepers in Kosovo are very small scale; the largest might have 500 hives. Varroa is not a huge problem (yet) and most hives are Lanstroths but skeps are also used. As the summers are long and hot (and the winters bitterly cold) there are two honey crops: one in June and another at the end of September. The bees are very gentle; Elizabeth has only been stung twice so far.

After a long round of applause, the 25 or so members of the York Beekeepers left the York Museum of Farming knowing a good deal more about life and beekeeping in Kosovo.



Jeff

Bee Quotes

'I like pulling on a baggy bee suit, forgetting myself and getting as close to the bees' lives as they will let me, remembering in the process that there is more to life than the merely human'

Sue Hubbell: A Book of Bees and How to Keep Them

Proposed Sale of Library Books

As the library is being used increasingly and more people are studying and taking exams, we are aware that there are a number of very useful new books we would like to purchase.

In the library at the moment we have duplicate copies of many books and some books that are never borrowed and the Committee has agreed that we can sell some of these to raise funds to buy new books. No books of historical or sentimental value (ie donated by well loved former members) will be sold: only books genuinely surplus to our needs.

We are finalising the prices to be asked for these books which will be offered to members first before advertising any unsold ones via the internet. Later this month you will all receive a list of these books and prices and you will be asked to contact Barbara if you wish to purchase any of these books.

Keep using the library and remember that books can be returned via B4Bs through out the summer if you cannot get to Horestone.

Julie

Member's Apiary: *Lesley Jones at the Garden Apiary in Northam*



My apiary is in my garden, or is it my garden that's in my apiary now that I have expanded to eight WBCs from the first nuc I had five years ago? Each is painted a bright colour, initially just because they looked nice like that, but also as an identifier each being in a different colour. I chose WBCs for their traditional looks and for the protection the double walled construction provides for a coastal site like mine subjected to the westerly winds straight off Hartland Point. Although the site is rather exposed and my attempts to grow a thick high hedge of mixed shrubs around the boundary have been thwarted by the horses in the field surrounding the garden, the bees seem to cope even on windy days to negotiate the landing home whilst being buffeted. At least there is good air flow.

The local forage is varied in this area between Bideford and Northam with many well stocked gardens in Chope and Bay View Roads and the Raleigh Hill area of Bideford. My neighbour has an orchard with apples and pear trees and the surrounding hedgerows provide blackthorn and blackberry while abundant gorse grows on the sides of the A39. My own garden provides early snowdrops, crocuses and heathers near the hives and lots of sedums for autumn forage as well as many bee friendly shrubs and perennials. If I have a spare raised bed, I sow a patch of phacelia which the bees love and a handful of borage seeds wherever there is a gap.

The bees have never been a problem to us while gardening or walking among the hives, or to the chickens pecking in the grass between them. My elderly mother used to push her 'wheels' close to them during her turns around the garden. The dog, however, has learned to keep a respectful distance, and lawn mowing is best done in the evenings and wearing a veil. The great advantage of having the hives in the garden is being able to enjoy watching the bees' activity;

on a sunny day to sit on the grass or pull up a deck chair and see the young bees orientating and the foragers returning with pouches full of pollen as well as the obvious convenience of having all the equipment stored nearby.

Realistically, if reluctantly, I have decided that eight hives is the limit for my garden apiary or is that apiary garden. I'll need another site for further expansion.



Lesley

NORTH DEVON BRANCH NOSEMA CLINIC

CANCELLED

This spring is the coldest on record for 50 years and the beekeeping season is well behind the expected schedule. The bees are rarely flying and it is too cold to open the hives to take a sample without the risk of disturbing the cluster or chilling the brood.

I have had a chat with our Branch Chairman and we have decided to cancel the Nosema Clinic that was arranged for 6 April.

When members are able to take a sample they can be examined by Chris Utting (01237 474 500) or Julie Elkin (01598 710 986), as Branch Microscopists, by arrangement for the usual fee of £1.00 per sample.

Chris Utting - Branch Microscopist

Plant of the Month



Family Rosaceae *Prunus spinosa*

Blackthorn

This shrubby small tree with long barbs on its branches makes stock proof hedging and is of interest all year. Between January and April it has masses of white flowers consisting of five petals and several pink anthers which dehisce to produce yellow pollen.

So valuable early in the year, the nectar is mostly too weak for bees to be interested in. It's fruit, which ripens in October is blue/black, hard, bitter and stoned. When left soaking for a few months in spirit and brown sugar it produces the beautiful dark red liqueur Sloe Gin (please invite me along when you crack open the bottle).

Those of you who meet me at the Apiary will see the stick which Clifford Davis made for me out of this wood, one of the finest for this purpose he says. A real countryman's plant.

Kay

Improvers' Course

Last year was one of the worst in memory for beekeeping. Unexpected swarms, poor Queens constantly being replaced by ever-ageing workers, little forage, damp and disease. Things can only get better. If the conditions last year tested your understanding of bees and their behaviour or you feel you coped admirably considering the conditions, maybe now is the time to consider formally "Improving your Beekeeping Skills" with our Improvers' Course at Horestone. It will be run on a Saturday or Sunday (not everyone has the opportunity to attend on a Tuesday) for a couple of hours over a period of 8 - 10 weeks at £5 per session or £30 for the whole course with some of our more experienced beekeepers

This is a chance to brush up your skills and learn some new ones with the opportunity of taking the Basic Assessment at the end of the summer. Taking the Basic Assessment is one of the most useful things you can do in terms of beekeeping and public confidence as the certificate may be required for proof of competency if keeping bees on an allotment or on someone else's land. The Assessment itself is a relaxed and informal affair looking at and talking about bees with a BBKA assessor.

Taking assessments and exams is not for everyone but continually learning about bees and how to be a better beekeeper is, so take this opportunity to learn a little bit more!

Cathy

March 2013 Starvation Risk

Important Information about Colony Food Levels.

With the continued poor weather looking to persist through to the end of March, colonies may be starting to run out of food (if they haven't already). It would be advisable to check the food levels by opening the hive and making a very quick observation on their store levels. Key points to remember are:

- The colony may still have stores available which are at the other end of the brood chamber to the cluster of bees. If there are 'empty' frames between the two then the bees could still starve, despite food being in the chamber. Move the frames of food directly next to the outer frame where the cluster resides, ensuring that you score each frame of food (not excessively, but enough to stimulate feeding). Be sure not to knock or roll the bees when doing this and to be as quick as possible.
- If the colony has little or no frames of food then give them a block of candy or fondant. You want to aim for about 2.5 kg per hive and although this may seem to be a great expense, it is far less than the money you will have wasted should the bees die.
- Mini plastic bags that are used to store loose fruit in from the supermarket are perfectly acceptable for holding the fondant and cost nothing. Pack the candy in the bag and then pierce holes in the appropriate place once you get to the hive. If the bag seems fragile then you can double bag it (just be sure to pierce both bags).
- At this time of the year we would usually start feeding sugar syrup but with these temperatures it is still too cold. Place the fondant directly above the bees, turning the crownboard if necessary so that one of the porter bee escape holes is above the cluster. Please be aware that this should be done as quickly and carefully as possible and although it may seem too cold to open the hive now, it is far better to do so knowing the bees are ok than not to and find later that they have died.

For more information please refer to Best Practice Guideline Number 7 – ['Emergency Feeding'](#).

National Bee Unit, FERA

DEVON COUNTY SHOW

THURSDAY 16, FRIDAY 17 and SATURDAY 18 MAY 2013



Competitive Exhibition

Calling all of you, including those who entered our Autumn Honey Show, which is one of the best in Devon and made it such a good event, it is not too late to enter your best samples of honey wax etc. in the County Show at Westpoint on 16, 17 and 18 May. It's time our branch won the "Division Cup" for the branch gaining the most points. Although the official last entry day is the 8th April, the Show Secretary Steve Ide (Phone 01392 353781) will usually accept entries up to a few days before the show. Check the DBKA website for the schedule. <http://www.devonbeekeepers.org.uk/> IF YOU ENTER AND STAGE ITEMS IN SIX CLASSES YOU WILL GAIN A FREE ENTRY TICKET TO THE COUNTY SHOW WORTH AT LEAST £18.00.

Honey Sales

The honey sales stand at the County show is looking for honey and other hive products to sell on your behalf at the County Show. Last year we sold over 500 one pound jars of honey alone, plus many more items of wax, preserves, cosmetics etc. so the County Show is a good place to promote your products.

This year, after three years of prices that haven't increased, we are increasing prices to reflect the increased costs of keeping bees. For example one pound jars of honey will sell at £6.00 each which gives the seller £4.80 after commission of 20% has been deducted. See the DBKA website for price list and offer of sale form. http://www.devonbeekeepers.org.uk/news_dcs.html



GETTING SHOW ENTRIES AND SALES ITEMS TO THE SHOW

I will be going to the show on Wednesday 15 May so if you can't take your show entries and products for sale there, but can get them to me, I'll take them and bring back any unsold items for you. Contact Jack Mummery on 01598760209 or mail at jackmummery@mypostoffice.co.uk

Jack

Nucs for Sale

Orders are being taken for 5 frame National nucs for June - queens will be daughters of Buckfast Queens from Jed Marshall (fathers unknown) - marked and clipped if required - at least three frames of brood and two frames of food - checked by the Seasonal Bee Inspector - will replace free of charge if any problems until end of August - will comply with the recent FERA 'Guidance for the sale of honey bee nuclei' will deliver and install in North Devon £120 - contact Chris Utting 01237 474 500.

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Member's contributions are very welcome: by 23rd of the month prior to publication please.