

NORTHERN LIGHTS

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

APRIL 2016

www.northdevonbees.org



USEFUL LINKS

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photos by Isabelle Backway

SKEP MAKING COURSE AT HORESTONE RUN BY MICK MALE OF NEWTON ABBOT BRANCH — DAY ONE

When I went to the skep course last Sunday, I wasn't sure what to expect. I had seen and used skeps before, but I didn't know what materials went into them or how to make them. Once I had taken the leaves off the straws that I would be using and finished making the tools that were needed, I soon discovered that getting the first tight twist on the straw was much harder than our tutor made it look. As the course progressed and I got more used to the pattern of the stitching, it became a bit easier and each stitch looked a little neater than the last. By the end of the day, I had just completed the bottom of my skep. After we had finished cleaning up the straw covered floor (which was a BIG mess), and said goodbye to everyone, we all went home with a bundle of straw and some binding, to continue with our skeps at home. It was a great day and apart from learning a lot, I sampled some delicious tasting cakes and buns! I am greatly looking forward to part two in April when we will be finishing our skeps.

Isabelle Backway

Chair Chat

Horestone apiary is open on Tuesdays now. The field is dry so parking is not a problem. The hut is warm, water is on tap but the weather has remained too cold to inspect the colonies to see how they have survived the winter. Plans for the future management of the bees is therefore on hold. We are hoping to have warm Tuesdays very soon.

The grounds are looking well maintained and there are spring flowers everywhere. The hives and frames have been prepared for the spring clean. We have wide, slip-proof steps into Albert's shed and an impressive shingle roof on the garden shed thanks to Barbara and Ian.

Our Winter Talks concluded in March. The Beginners' course continues on Sundays at Horestone until the beginning of May. Once this course has ended, the committee plans to arrange for the apiary to open on one weekend a month.

The organisers of the Devon County Show, 19th-21st May, are hoping that members of our Branch will enter honey and/or other hive products, and offer to act as stewards. The details are in the March edition of Beekeeping and on the website. Entries for the Show must be in by 20th April.

Mave

Flying With My Sisters

Out in the fresh air I'm hesitant; the scents all new, the brilliant sun bedazzling.

My sisters urge me on. We fly at noon, up and away into the crystal air.

My sisters are strong, protective, they've flown before.

Then, gaining confidence, I begin to soar; higher and higher towards the glorious sun.

I'm free, alone, a mile above the earth.

The sky behind me darkens; I sense the drone of many wings.

The first to come takes my virginity, others swiftly follow, remove his mark; leave theirs.

Giving their lives for this glorious moment, one by one they drop.

Then I, exhausted, heavy, descend towards the earth.

And there are my sisters, come to guide me home.

Back to my destiny, to live in darkness while my sisters feel the sun.

Quietly building family – daughter, daughter, daughter,

daughter, daughter, son...

My sisters brought me sweets of flowers; the sun's warmth on their honeyed tongues.

They fed me, cleansed me, pampered me, and one by one they fell.

But I shall fly again one day, one sultry summer's afternoon...

As the temperature rises

As the pressure builds

As the heat becomes too much to bear

Then I'll be flying – flying with my daughters!

Christine Mottram

A FEW THOUGHTS ABOUT FLOWERS

As I write this on Good Friday morning the sun is shining, the bees are flying and coming home with pollens of numerous hues but of that harbinger of the new beekeeping season, the red flowering currant there isn't a hint of colour on my neighbours bush. With all the problems our bees and other pollinators are facing with agricultural monocultures, hedgerows flailed into near non existence and general lack of forage they don't need batty horticulturalists adding to their problems. Last week on a quite dull and chilly day at Rosemoor the honey and bumble bees were busy on those wonderfully abundant early providers of pollen and nectar, the hellebores but the plant breeders are doing their best (worst!) to breed them with upturned flowers heads, so we don't need to get down on our knees to admire those beautiful markings inside the flower ! Someone should tell them that the early pollinators need the hanging flowerheads early in the year as they provide shelter and a temperature a degree or two higher inside those dropping heads than the outside air, another example of the long and mutually beneficial relationship between plants and their pollinators. By this time of year I usually have the first poached egg flowers out but only a few leaves so far but it must be time to start sowing all those lovely annuals for the bees, a garden full of these can help bridge the June gap. Many years ago at college a crop lecturer warning against the dangers of sowing seed too early assured us that if you could sit comfortably with your bare backside on the soil it was warm enough to sow! Hadn't soil thermometers been invented? And no he didn't offer to demonstrate this infallible technique. I am off out to remove a dead rosemary and contemplate what the bees would like me to plant instead.

Julie



BEGINNERS' CLASS

The class now meets at Horestone Apiary where they split into small groups each led by a teacher. Here Barbara shows them how to make up frames. On the right Glenis covers the uses of a nuc box.



Committee Summaries in March

Branch meeting: All committee meetings include items such as finance, education, maintenance, beekeeping etc. I try to mention items which are new and may be of interest to you. There will be general advice for all swarm-collectors in Northern Lights. There is a Mini-Beasts event at Exmoor Zoo in June. Our Branch will be providing an information display. We have twenty fewer members registering this year. The committee are keeping in mind the comments gathered in the questionnaire circulated last year although few members added their views.

County AGM and Executive committee meetings 19th March: The County Committee thought that they needed to improve their communication with the Branches. More information such as The Yearbook is being sent via the website and internet banking is to be used more in future. In the past, the user name and password for the website were found at the bottom of the 'Contents' page in 'Beekeeping'. This is not thought to meet with data protection and privacy policies. I will be asking Martin Pollock, our secretary, to send out the password which is no longer honeypot2. The advantage of having the Year Book on-line is that the beekeepers who apply late can have their details added during the year. There is a Disclaimer form for swarm collectors which can be found on-line. Declaration of Interest issues, Gift aid, the need for a Spring and Autumn lecture are under review. At the AGM we had a speaker, Dr Declan Schroeder, who is researcher at Plymouth University. His topic was about the influence of varroa and the DW virus on honeybees. It was a very informative talk and a break from the routine committee matters.

Mave on behalf of the Committees



BEE EQUIPMENT AUCTION AT TAUNTON

Several members attended the annual auction held on 20 March at Ruishton village hall. New National supers in cedar went for £10 and complete National hives in good condition for about £100. The best deal was a 6 frame stainless steel electric extractor for only £220

HOW TO COLLECT A SWARM

If you are interested in being included on the BBKA swarm list you should register your details with our Hon. Secretary, Martin Pollock. Collecting swarms is a fun and possibly a rewarding thing to do; it can also be fraught with problems. If you are contacted about the possibility of collecting a swarm you should:

Ascertain whether the swarm location is within your range of preparedness to travel.

Ask the contact what they have; e.g. numbers of "bees", a description of what the "swarm" looks like, what the "bees" look like, how active they are etc. It is surprising how many people confuse wasps, bumble bees, solitary bees with honey bees.

Check where the swarm is. People will contact us sometimes when they discover a well established swarm in a roof or cavity wall will cost a lot of money to have removed professionally.

Preferably have a quarantine apiary where you can have the swarm without any risk of diseased bees spreading their disease to your home colonies

WAY UP WHETHER IT IS WORTH PURSUING. Consider any risks to you and others as well as property before you agree to collect any swarm. Be careful if the contact sounds as if they want paying for it. I once arrived at a huge swarm hanging down from a bedroom window at about 22.00 on a warm summer evening. The resident started asking whether swarms were valuable and suggested that our local bee farmer paid money for them (Quince don't collect swarms). So my response was I would charge him £25.00 and give him £20.00 or get back in my car and go home. He pleaded with me to take them as his wife was going frantic! That swarm was easy to collect and huge and gave me 28 out of a crate of 32 English sections a few weeks later! If you want to charge for your trouble you may be venturing into all sorts of legal contract issues and liability issues; its probably best to do it as a favour from a public spirited beekeeper.

IF YOU DECIDE TO COLLECT THE SWARM

Get the contact to re-check that the swarm is still there just before you leave to collect it.

Take the following with you: Your usual beekeeping equipment and protective clothing, a spray bottle of clean water to calm the swarm (better than a smoker as there won't be any honey for the bees to gorge on following smoking), a straw skep or a good cardboard box that isn't too ridged; you may have to squeeze it into an awkward space to put the swarm in, a large white non fluffy bed sheet on which to place the container, some string to tie up the sheet, a pair of secateurs or loppers to cut off a branch holding the swarm and a bee brush or goose wing to brush the swarm into your container. On arrival assess how you are going to tackle the task. Advise the contact what you are going to do. Make sure you put on your bee suit securely, Don't believe that swarming bees don't sting! Ensure any bystanders are at a safe distance.

Place the sheet under the swarm or as close to it as possible and shake, brush, or however the swarm into your skep/box. If the swarm is on a post, invert the container over the post and smoke or spray the bees UP into the box. Place the box/skep, open end onto the sheet and prop up one side with a stone or similar. If you have the queen with the bees any flying bees will soon find the swarm. If you have left the queen behind the bees will quite quickly leave the container and return to the swarm site. Return to the swarm site at dusk. Check carefully that the swarm is still in the container and gather up the corners of the sheet to completely enclose the container and tie the sheet. As long as there are not any gaps you should be able to safely transport the swarm to where you intend to hive the swarm.

HIVING THE SWARM

On arrival at your quarantine apiary, have a Nuc box of new frames and foundation or a full hive with the same, ready to hive the swarm in. Place the container on the ground in front of the hive entrance and untie the sheet.

Pull the sheet up to the hive entrance. Remove the roof and crown board and take 4 frames out from the centre. Shake the contents of the container into the space and gently replace the frames. As the bees move the frames will settle into their position. Relocate the crown board and roof.



Alternatively, shake the swarm onto the sheet in front of the hive and watch the bees walk into the hive, a thrilling sight to witness.

Drone Laying Queens - winter talk by Glyn Davies

This talk was the last in our series of winter talks – it was well attended and was very interesting. Glyn, Reg Godwin and DARG first became interested in doing research into Drone Laying queens (DLQ's) back in 2011/2012 when the group became aware that there were many reports that the incidence of DLQ's was increasing. Up until then beekeepers had assumed that if a queen became a drone layer, it was simply because she had run out of sperm. But in view of the mating habits of virgin queens, i.e. multiple matings, the large number of drones in the drone congregation areas and the mathematics of sperm numbers, the project began to look at other reasons for the problem. With a strong group of supporters and helpers, the project began a histological study of the spermatheca of drone laying queens as compared to normal fertile queens. The researchers hypotheses is that varroa infestation is a possible culprit with drones infected with viruses, sexually transmitting disease to the queens causing damage to the walls of the spermatheca. Glyn showed us slides of dissected spermatheca which appeared to show damage – Glyn said that more work would need to be done with appropriate controls. Last November the DARG Drone Laying Queen project won the Vita Pinnacle Award. This was a great achievement and the Group now plan further work and will be in need of more queens for their analysis.

This report from Glyn's fascinating talk only covers a small amount of what was discussed – if you would like more information and a summary of DARG's award winning study, visit www.dargbees.org.

After the talk there was a very animated question and answer session before Mave took pity on Glyn and bought the meeting to an end. We look forward to hearing more about the project in the near future, and if you do find yourselves with a drone laying queen, please contact Glyn.

And many thanks to Chris Utting who organized and arranged all the winter talks.

Sylvie



Glyn Davies and Alan Barrow share a few thoughts about DLQs

photo by colin wood



SOUTH MOLTON

Bee keeper buzzing with pride

A BEE keeper from South Molton has been recognised as a Master of Excellence in his field.

Paddy Wallace from Quince Honey Farm was presented with a certificate by the Lord Mayor of London, Lord Mountevans, at a ceremony held on Monday, February 15, at Fishmongers' Hall on London Bridge.

Upon receiving his award Paddy said: "It is such a great honour and it has been a very humbling experience."

He was born in 1953 and has been beekeeping since he was old enough to extract honey from his father's hives. Paddy and his father worked together to create Quince Honey Farm and Paddy was the first person to create mechanically operated opening hives. Quince Honey Farm has since become a tourist attraction where visitors can see honey produced first hand.

Paddy's contribution to beekeeping has also been recognised by the Livery Skills Council which helped Paddy and the Bee Farmers Association set up an apprenticeship scheme.

The Court of the Worshipful Company of Wax Chandlers, one of the sponsors of the apprenticeship scheme, voted unanimously Paddy should be awarded a Masters certificate.



PADDY Wallace with Dr Andrew Mair, Master of the Worshipful Company of Wax Chandlers.

cutting from North Devon Journal

Edited by Chris Utting e-mail chrisutting@btinternet.com The views expressed in the articles are the author's and not necessarily those of the North Devon Branch of the Devon Beekeepers' Association.

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