

NORTHERN LIGHTS

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

AUGUST 2014

www.northdevonbees.org



Chair Chat

I have just got back from helping Chrissie at the North Devon Show. Our end of the Craft tent was heaving with interested people from 8.30 am onwards – all wanting a look at the observation hive and to talk about bees. Many of them had watched the two-part documentary 'Hive Alive', presented by Martha Karney and Chris Packham. I am sure the documentary will bring in many more recruits – so we kept pushing how important it was to attend a Beginners course before thinking about buying bees.

The Honey tasting at the show was very popular – we are now regulars and people come back for their pot of honey year after year. So thank you to everyone who helped on the day, and to those that contributed honey and fudge for the event. Don't forget to put some of your honey and produce by ready to exhibit it at our Branch Honey Show on 13/14th September.

You should by now all have received your August copy of Beekeeping. Please read the article by Barry Neal on the review of the DBKA Constitution. The article explains that the Association (DBKA) is a registered charity managed by Trustees who are your Branch Chairman and Secretary. Our constitution was thought to be in need of an update and full details of the review and the draft document will be sent round to you by Martin, and can also be found on the DBKA website. Each Branch has been asked to consolidate their members views and comments and report back to the working group by 5th September. So please check out the draft document and let your committee know your views/thoughts so that we can pass them on at the next EC meeting.

Sylvie

Events 2014

13&14 Sep All Day	Branch Honey Show, St Johns Garden Centre, Barnstaple
16 Nov	14:00-16:00 Branch AGM, Castle Centre, Barnstaple

Bee Quotes

'Bees work for man, and yet they never bruise
Their Master's flower, but leave it having
done,

As fair as ever and as fit to use;
So both the flower doth stay and honey run.'

George Herbert, The Church-Providence

It's Show Time - Your Branch Honey Show



It's time to start planning your entries for the Branch Honey Show. The Show is on 14 and 15 September at St Johns Garden Centre, Barnstaple as usual. If you've never thought about showing why not give it a go this year? Remember that there are novice classes for honey and wax and, of course, if you're bees haven't been successful this year then why not try your hand at the other classes such as cookery and crafts?

Chrissie and her team will be waiting for your entries on the Saturday but remember to get your entry forms in to her by Thursday 11 September.

The Show Schedule and Entry Forms are attached to this edition of NL.

Good luck.

Jeff



Member's Apiary: Jack Mummery

I have two main out apiaries and a home apiary in my garden, used to quarantine any swarms, to ensure they are not carrying foul brood. I also use my home apiary to introduce queens into nuclei colonies, but I don't keep full colonies there as bees don't agree with my wife or some neighbours.

My main apiary is situated in a field South of Swimbridge, about 5 miles from my home. The forage is varied but not as good as I would like as we are in the middle of a dairy area with pure grass and maize, the predominant crops. There is quite a lot of blackthorn, which can provide an early nectar crop and the usual wild hedgerow flowers with some rose bay willow herb which can produce some late nectar. There is plenty of bramble which is flowering particularly well this year plus some clover in neighbouring paddocks. Sometimes, oil seed rape is grown within a couple of miles of the apiary but I seldom harvest very much honey from it. There are mature woods on one side of my apiary and a vineyard a few hundred metres away. I have a lot of Christmas trees that are now too large to sell but they do produce some dark tree honey or honeydew honey. We particularly grow some vegetables there, potatoes, peas and broad beans but the bees do not seem to be interested in the broad beans. The advantage of my out apiary is that the bees do not interfere with anybody and I can do what I like there. The disadvantage of an out apiary is that I have to travel to it and anticipate what I will need to do as I don't have anywhere to keep equipment there. Security is not that good; I have had some things stolen from my field over the years, including a measuring jug which I left out with a bucket of syrup and some large 25lt. water containers but other than a roof knocked off a hive one year and some air rifle pellets in some of the woodwork another, there hasn't been any interference with any hives.



My other apiary is about one and a half miles from my home, in the opposite direction from my main apiary and used as a queen mating apiary. The people who own the field keep sheep there but initially wanted bees to pollinate their apple trees. The owners are very good, not minding me coming and going and don't mind a number of posts around the field on top of which I place apideas with queen cells. I don't know any other beekeepers nearby but there probably will be. I have two colonies in this apiary into which I place a couple of sheets of drone foundation in the middle of March so there are plenty of mature drones by mid-May.

In total I have grown to 11 colonies this year but will probably unite some in the early autumn to reduce total numbers to around 9.

Jack

Topical Tips for August

- After such a good nectar flow last month when you come to take off the supers you may find that as the colony has run out of room brace comb has been built in the bee space between the supers. As the super is lifted it leaves a sticky mass of honey and then drips everywhere. This can be controlled if you scrape the honey/comb from the top bars, replace the super and leave it for a couple of days. The colony will then usually clean up and seal the honey comb so that when you return the super can be removed without all the mess.
- Do not put supers directly on the ground as they will easily pick up all sorts of contamination that can be passed into your honey.
- If you have run out of shallow supers and there is still nectar coming in put a brood box full of new deep foundation over the queen excluder. The colony then has an opportunity to store the honey. You will then build up food for the colony during the winter.
- If you are running out of foundation then cut a sheet into 25mm strips and fit this under the top bar of a shallow frame to produce a crop for cut comb.

- When preparing to extract honey make a pile of supers over a low heater and cover in blankets. When the honey is warm it will extract much quicker and more efficiently.
- When uncapping the supers remember to cut upwards (being careful not to catch your fingers). If the frame is leaning slightly towards the knife the cappings will fall away from the comb and blade and make the job easier.
- Current prices for a 10 pack of Apiguard – MANN LAKE £21.76 (plus postage & VAT), THORNES £22.50 (plus postage & VAT), NATIONAL BEE SUPPLIES £25.96 including VAT (plus postage) – MODERN BEEKEEPING of Barnstaple do not list Apiguard in their website.
- The robbing season is about to start so do not leave hives open during an examination for too long; beware of the New Zealand colonies (*Apis mellifera ligustica*) as they are well known for their robbing characteristics.
- Reduce the hive entrances before the wasps start to appear and if you want to use wasp traps do not put them next to the hive as it will encourage the wasps to rob the hive.
- Check that all cracks/gaps in the supers etc joints are wasp proof – I always carry a piece of plastic foam to stuff in any gaps.
- Watch out for the Asian Hornet; they will be hovering at the hive entrance facing towards the returning foragers.
- If you are intending to use a varroicide that works by evaporation do not leave it too late as the summer temperature may drop unpredictably in the autumn.
- See BBKA NEWS AUGUST page 281. Brian Dennis was a member of North Devon Branch for many years and served for a long period on the branch committee. Brian lived at Weare Gifford and he has an interesting beekeeper's grave-stone in the churchyard (see photo taken by David Charles).



Chris Utting

Beginner's' Course 2014– a Student's View

Terry Pratchett tells us "if three dwarves have a discussion, there will be four points of view". I think the same can be said of beekeepers. The exception to this rule is the teaching team at NDBK. They have put together a program which covers the basics of bee keeping without being patronising or draconian.

This year's beginners' course was definitely 'book early to avoid disappointment'. I was passing the NDBK stand at the North Devon show and picked up a leaflet for the taster day as I had inherited a hive with bees, with very limited knowledge of what to do.

The taster day went well. It was a warm day so bee suits were quickly donned and it got 'practical' very quickly. Julie showed why it was that she was responsible for the beginners at the club. She oozed confidence and explained what she was doing and why it was being done. Everyone who wanted to take out a frame was allowed to do so, but there was no pressure on those that didn't. Then it was back into the hut for tea and cakes. Cathy left out a form to sign up for the beginners' course and I thought, bees and cake, what's not to like?

We were kept up to date prior to the course by Cathy with text messages setting out dates, locations and subject matter.

The first two talks were held in Barnstaple. We covered bee anatomy and life cycle, followed by foraging. I was a bit miffed that I was being given homework but my protestations fell on deaf ears! In the end the home study really helped.

We were privileged to witness Cathy's impression of a bee's thorax, with imaginary wings. We were informed that drones, like males of other species, contributed little towards the day to day running of the hive." They don't forage, they have to beg for food and are of little use, other than to procreate," Cathy told us. I sensed that the women present shared a sisterly sigh, whilst the men thought, "I can get this kind of abuse at home, for free". I just smiled and, sensing this probably wasn't the place to ask for a chance to procreate, asked for another piece of cake instead. This seemed to satisfy all the stereotypes nicely, and we moved on.

Initially I failed to grasp the importance of understanding the life cycle of the bee. We were told the length of time worker, drone and queen took to develop from egg to bee. I duly wrote the number of days down and then filed it under boring. It wasn't long into the course that I realised I had made a huge mistake and that it was probably the most important information to help monitor inspection and wellbeing of the hive.

Week three and lessons moved to the Horestone apiary. By now we were getting to know each other better having worked in teams. The club hut provided a very homely feel to the sessions and as always, there was cake. We were taught how to make a frame. And allowed to take our efforts home. Mine ended up on the fridge to be admired of course. Old habits die hard. All speakers were informative, interesting and knowledgeable in their subject matter. There was a great deal of 'this is what I do' and very little 'you must do this'. A very good bit of advice from Sue: if you have a problem, ask one person what to do and stick to that one person. We were very lucky with the weather and there was plenty of opportunity to open up the hives and get hands on experience. Julie continued to explain all aspects of the hive inspections at a level that all could understand.

Following the sessions I would go home check my bees only to find, before the week was done, I would experience the same problems we had just talked about! Lesson 4 - swarming. Within a week mine had swarmed. We covered robbing and on returning found my nuc was being robbed. I was dreading the talk on diseases'.

As the course progressed I decided to join the Tuesday group at the Horestone apiary. This was a great help as numbers around the beginners' hives were much smaller and on some days it was almost one to one tuition. My confidence grew and I got to meet a lot more of the members. All of whom were friendly and helpful. Tuesdays are a great opportunity to ask those niggling questions that as a beginner have kept you up half the night. Even though the answer you get will usually be 'Don't worry about it. The bees will sort it out'. The Tuesday meetings are lively and informative, but regardless of personal feeling on wing clipping or chemicals, once the club has decided then all members adhere to the decision. If you are unsure with what to do with your own bees, someone will be doing that particular aspect in one of the hives and you can always tag along and watch.

We were now reaching the end of the course. The group had bonded well as was evident from the heckling during the practicals and excuses such as 'my dog ate my homework'. Lists were put up for nucs and mentors for those who had hives or worries about siting their hives. It has been so helpful to have an experienced beekeeper visit my hives and share their wisdom and advice.

The nucs on the Horestone site are nearly ready to sell and that, along with the swarms that some of the beginners have managed to catch themselves, means that with luck and a following wind there will be another 15 beekeepers joining the NDBK thereby promoting and encouraging the reason we are all involved in bee keeping . . . the love of bees.

A huge thank you to all the members who gave up their time to help us in our endeavour to become beekeepers.

Robin Hootton

Edited by Jeff Orr, e-mail jeffjorr@aol.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.