

So with my infallible plan of action, I upturn the skep, place it carefully under the swarm and WHACK WHACK WHACK it against the branch. The bees, who haven't read the plan, go crazy. I am teetering, in a cloud of bees, on a very high ladder holding a skep and half a swarm of bees. I descend - perhaps not as slowly and carefully as planned - and hand Chris the skep. He places it on the sheet and we watch for signs of success. He advises we go back to the other swarm and do the same. Stupidly I was wearing flip-flops (yes, I see now this is not BBKA-approved footwear) and I trap a bee under the strap who, having been whacked from her branch then squashed, has had enough and indignantly stings me. My first sting! I wait to die of anaphylactic shock and am amazed when I realize I am still alive with no ill effects

Being a very experienced swarm catcher now, I stretch into the holly and manage to get about 70% of the second swarm into the skep which we upturn onto a second sheet. Whilst enjoying a cuppa we see signs that one or two of the remaining 30% are dutifully walking up the sheet and into the skep. All at once the small ball of bees left on the holly suddenly leave the tree and the whole back garden is filled with a cloud of bees. The sheet is like a Heathrow runway - they are landing and marching up the sheet into the skep in droves. I am surrounded by thousands of my bees feeling enormously happy.

Full of new confidence we head back to the first swarm. The skep is empty!!!! The swarm is back in the tree, 15 feet up. Disappointed, I have another go but again only catch 50% in the skep. I bite my nails for an hour at home during which time Cathy calls with the offer of a brood box and poly nuc.

I go back to the first swarm, this time with my non-beekeeping hubby in the role of ladder-holder. Praying for a skep full of bees, I approach but the bees are back in the tree. But I can't leave it at that. Besides, this time I have brought a long-handled rake so maybe I can pull the branch down and get more bees in the skep. I'm up the ladder in a flash, pulling the branch with the rake whilst WHACKING and WHACKING the skep against the branch. There are bees in the skep, bees on the ground, bees in the air, bees, bees, bees everywhere. I shoot down the ladder and up turn the skep on the sheet. There are still bees in the tree - I grab a nearby bucket as a makeshift skep and go up again and WHACK WHACK WHACK the bucket against the branch - a few more bees are unceremoniously dumped in with their sisters under the upturned skep. We wait, we go home. Cathy arrives with the temporary hives and lovely encouraging words.

Thirty minutes later, back at the swarm, all we see is bees flying from the skep back to the tree. I failed. The swarm is going to reassemble on the tree and I have to accept my bees are gone.

But maybe if I gave it one last, LAST go - what's to lose?? I'm up the ladder again in a flash with skep, then bucket, then bucket again. I am scooping bees off the ground and adding them into the skep - every available bee is going in that skep this time. The textbook is long-forgotten. We go

home and I nibble some tea, eager to go back and see if the fourth attempt has worked. At dusk we go back. As I approach the tree I can hardly bear to look to see whether the swarm is back up there. To my amazement there's nothing - just a slightly trimmed Pittosporum not showing the slightest trace of the battle which has been played out in its branches and ... the skep is happily humming with lots of lovely bees.

I wrap it quickly in case they change their minds, tie it with string and we jump in the car - in full bee suits - and drive home. Now for the tricky bit - getting the bees from the skeps into the boxes. A lovely problem to have! The holly tree swarm is easy - nice big space in the brood box and a sharp flick of the wrist with the upturned skep and the girls are in. The frames are closed together, crown board, a feeder and the roof. Job done! The Pittosporum swarm has to squeeze into the poly nuc and these girls have been messed about all day. I do what I can and they're in with feed and a prayer.

I now have four colonies, a reduced bank balance and bemused neighbours but, most importantly, a great story to tell over cake at the apiary.

Zara Svensson



photos by Zara Svensson



Thought you might be interested in the attached poster seen in a boulangerie in South West France. Good to see the French authorities are trying to keep track of the pest.

Tim Allen

## HORESTONE OPEN SUNDAY – 17<sup>th</sup> July 2016

It was the first sunny day of the year, or at least it felt like it, when Mave, Julie, Barbara and a few new beekeepers threw wide the doors at Horestone Apiary for an open day. This was in response to a request from those unable to attend the Tuesday sessions that normally take place from noon onwards for anyone interested in coming along. This was the first in a series of four so hopefully those busy during the week will get a chance to come along and experience the magic of beekeeping.

Eight people attended and were treated to a fine array of home made cakes and biscuits before donning bee-suits and venturing to the hives. Four hives were opened and our guests were taken through the basics of beekeeping. It was gratifying to see a couple of members fresh from this year's course waxing lyrical; displaying the knowledge they had gained with the enthusiasm needed for them to develop as beekeepers.

After familiarising the visitors with the National hives, Julie took the time to explain that there were other beekeeping methods and hive types depending upon the desired outcome. After a glance at the WBC we had a quick look through a top-bar hive, which was useful if only to realise that it wasn't for me!

Sara, one of our recent students, had invited a couple of the attendees. She had recovered a swarm from their garden and turned their irritation to fascination such that they came along to find out more. Another couple brought along their young son who was clearly keen to progress his interest in bees a bit further despite a sting on the ankle. It is healthy for the bees future if those in their formative years can maintain an interest and manage bees through life, with the added bonus of doing something that doesn't need a smart phone!

So, it was a very worthwhile few hours spent in the wonderful dappled sunlit environment that is Horestone on days like this. Three of our guests signed up straightaway for the forthcoming 'taster day' so hopefully the next training course will be as well attended as the previous ones.

Colin Woodridge

### THE STRANGE TALE OF THE WBC HIVE IN A YEAR THAT IS ANYTHING BUT 'NORMAL'.

The colony headed by a 2015 queen was first inspected on 19<sup>th</sup> April when we found a lot of drone brood, some worker and one rather scruffy sealed queen cell. We couldn't find the queen but as there were eggs we left them to see if they would supersede an obviously failing queen. We weren't very hopeful as it was early in the year for drones to be available and the weather poor.

**10<sup>th</sup> May** — Old queen cell gone, queen possibly still there as there were some very young larvae but mostly drone so a comb with eggs was put in.

**24<sup>th</sup> May** — No queen cells drawn, same pattern of mostly drone brood so left for a week to see what might happen.

**31<sup>st</sup> May** — Queen obviously not there so given a last chance with another comb with eggs.

**7<sup>th</sup> June** — A good queen cell plus several smaller others.

**5<sup>th</sup> July** — Still no sign of a functioning queen. We saw that the workers had constructed a 'curtain' inside the entrance (which was small anyway). It covered the entrance with a small hole in the middle. Very interesting behaviour, were they trying to keep the brood nest warm or keeping out intruders?

**19<sup>th</sup> July** — As in the photo, the curtain has been altered to the middle with gaps either side. In the interests of education, as that is what Horestone is all about, we have left the remains of this colony to see if laying workers will now occur.



Julie Elkin

photo by Chris Utting

## North Devon Show

The sun shone and we all had a very good day; I hope as many as possible of you went and enjoyed this good day out. I wish to thank all those apiary members who came to help with our display. It is a very busy day, lots of hard work but you all made the day run without problems; thank you for your time and effort.

It is very heart-warming to see how many of the public both old and young come into the craft tent to see our bees in the observation hive. It is very satisfying to see so many interested people; it gives us a great opportunity to show how the apiary works and how beekeeping should be done.

We sold most of our honey, all of the fudge and covered our cost; what more could we ask?

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**Our next show** is your Honey Show at St John's Garden Centre 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> September.

Four weeks away, so get busy.

The schedule has gone round, let Martin Pollock know if you have not had your copy.

It is time to get all your entries together and don't forget, there is a class for everyone, so you can all put something on show.

*Barbara*

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## Chair Chat

Horestone apiary has been busy during July with visitors and extra members.

A very successful Taster Day was held on Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup>. The sun shone and our fourteen visitors were able to inspect the colonies. At least seven have signed up for next year's Beginners Course. **The next Taster Day will be held on September 4<sup>th</sup>** and four people have already signed on for this one. The Taster days and the Beginners courses bring in most of our income....and they keep Cathy very busy.

The sun shone again on Sunday, 17<sup>th</sup> July for our second Beekeeping Sunday. Visitors and members helped with the management of the hives followed by much chat and cake. The next Beekeeping Sunday will be held on 21<sup>st</sup> August.

Barbara has been occupied with preparing for the North Devon Show held on August 3<sup>rd</sup> and with our Honey Show in September. These events involve a lot of planning and organisation.....and setting up of stands, settling the bees into the observation hive and ensuring that there are plenty of information sheet, honey for sale etc..

There have had worrying reports of EFB being found in hives only four miles from Horestone. This means that all beekeepers must be especially vigilant and report concerns they may have to the Bee Inspectors.

I would like to thank all our members who have been fully stretched during this hectic time of year.

Best wishes,

*Mave*

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Last month I mentioned a complaint that the font size of 10pt was too small and I increased it to 12pt and asked for feedback.

Only two members responded and they both said the larger font was easier to read.

So I have decided that it will stay at 12pt.

Chris Utting Editor



**Here is the latest  
New Zealand  
commemorative coin**



## Which pollinator-friendly plants are in your garden?

Gardeners are invited to take part in a new RHS study that aims to identify the most widely grown pollinator-friendly plants, and to assess how good UK gardens are for pollinators overall.

The study is a partnership between the RHS and the University of Bristol. The data collected will help RHS scientists prioritise future research into the quality of pollinator resources provided by garden plants.

Gardeners are also being asked to nominate plants not currently included on the RHS 'Perfect for Pollinators' lists.

Leading the study for the RHS is Stephanie Bird, RHS Plant Health Scientist. She is appealing for all gardeners, from those with windowboxes or small urban gardens to those with larger gardening spaces, to complete the survey, which runs until September.

✦ [www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/RHSp4pSurvey](http://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/RHSp4pSurvey)

### North Devon Branch committee meeting summary. 11<sup>th</sup> July 2016

- We have needed to change some of our information leaflets as Cathy Backway has offered to be the contact person for our Branch in place of Derek Hunter.
- The Honey Show schedule was finalised ready to send out to our members and to our judges.
- We have been advised to review the Branch insurance policy following the arson at Newton Abbot apiary.
- We are to take photographs of our assets.
- The new extractor is ready for members to use. The cost of hire is to be £10 and instructions about cleaning are kept inside the drum.
- Our internet banking is up and running.
- The display at Exmoor Zoo during Mini Beasts month was well received and Barbara has been asked if she would participate again next year.

*Mave, on behalf of the committee*

### DBKA Executive Committee meeting summary: 16<sup>th</sup> July

There have been ongoing discussions about Spray Liaison. Please see BBKA News, August page 265 where there is a notice about the scheme being in operation now. It is called BeeConnected.

The county has been without an Education Officer for some time. Ken Basterfield has been elected to take on the role after assurances that his commercial interests would not impact on the position. Ken is also our area representative at the BBKA.

There is to be no Autumn lecture.

*Mave*

Edited by Chris Utting e-mail [chrisutting@btinternet.com](mailto: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***