

# NORTHERN LIGHTS

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

DECEMBER 2013 [www.northdevonbees.org](http://www.northdevonbees.org)



## Chair Chat

After our recent AGM Barbara has stepped down as Chair and I have taken up the role. Our thanks go to Barbara for all her hard work and commitment – she is a hard act to follow. Happily, as Apiary Co-ordinator, we will still benefit from her energy and organizing skills. A thank you must to our outgoing Committee who have done their various jobs so well all year. Our new Committee is in place, there have not been many changes as such, but we do have a new Vice Chair, Mave Dowling (thank you Mave). The new AST group will be set up soon as well. So all that's left for me to do is to wish us all well and hope that we enjoy our roles within the Branch. Thank you too for all those members that support our activities in so many ways.

I'm not sure when you will get this newsletter as Martin has computer problems so there may be a delay in emailing them out. It has made us realise how reliant we are on Martin and his computer, and Jeff with the newsletter – they do such a good job and are both very necessary for all our communications.

A few reminders as we come to the end of the year. Our last afternoon at Horestone is Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> December, Mince Pie Tuesday, mince pies and other seasonal fare, from midday – we hope you will join us. The apiary will close from then till the end of February.

Also a reminder that the renewal of your membership will soon be due. I'm sure the subscription form will be emailed to you when computers are up and running.

This will be the last NL for this year. It is time for a rest and to look forward to the Xmas festivities. Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

*Sylvie*

## Events 2013-14

<b>Tues 10 December 12:00 onwards</b>	<b>Mince Pies at Horestone</b>
<b>Thurs 16 January 19.00 - 21.00</b>	<b>Talk 'Bee Bits' by Chris Utting, Castle Centre, Barnstable</b>
<b>Thurs 13 February 19.00 - 21.00</b>	<b>Talk 'Nosema' by Glyn Davis, Castle Centre, Barnstable</b>
<b>Thurs 13 March 19.00 - 21.00</b>	<b>Talk 'Predator Mites' by Richard Ball, Castle Centre, Barnstable</b>

## SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE DUE

Your membership is due for renewal on the 1st January. Please send you completed form and cheque promptly to our membership secretary in order to continue receiving full membership benefits.

*Derek*

## Introduction to Bee Microscopy

Are you interested in looking at the microscopic world of bee keeping?

We are starting a new course at the Castle Centre on Monday evenings from 7.15 until 9.15 pm 27<sup>th</sup> January, 24<sup>th</sup> February and 31<sup>st</sup> March after which we will meet monthly at Horestone apiary.

No experience is needed; some microscopes will be available to borrow if required.

We are a self-help group of beekeepers and welcome all levels of interested people, there will be an option to take the BBKA microscope exam if desired.

We will be looking at the microscope and how it works, pollen, bee anatomy, bee diseases and more.

For more details or to register your interest please email Graham Kingham at [hestia.kingham@waitrose.com](mailto:hestia.kingham@waitrose.com) and leave a contact telephone number.

## Bee Quotes

'Life is the flower for which love is the honey.'

**Victor Hugo**

## AGM Awards



David Easton being presented with the Basic Beekeeping Certificate



Cliff Davis receiving The Bernard Pritchard Trophy, Novices trophy for run honey



Mave Dowling – The Chris Utting Trophy, Novices trophy for wax



Derek Hunter, The Branch Trophy, the most points for Honey Classes



Flowers to thank Barbara for all her hard work during her 2 years as Chair.



Chrissie Preece – The Hustwayte Plate, the most points in the Cookery Classes



Chrissie Preece, The Beryl Smailes Trophy, the most number of points overall



Sylvia Barber, The Croyde Cup, the Best Exhibit in the Light Run Honey Classes

# New Branch Officers appointed at the November AGM

<b>Chair</b>	Sylvia Barber
<b>Vice Chair</b>	Mavis Dowling
<b>Branch Secretary</b>	Martin Pollock
<b>Treasurer</b>	Derek Hunter
<b>Show and Social Event Co-ordinator</b>	Christine Preece
<b>Education and Examination Officer</b>	Cathy Backway
<b>Committee Members</b>	Alan Barrow, Barbara Carlyle, and Cliff Davis
<b>Membership Secretary</b>	Charmain Woolley
<b>Newsletter Editor</b>	Jeff Orr
<b>Apiary Quartermaster</b>	Albert Cannon
<b>Microscopist</b>	Chris Utting assisted by Julie Elkin
<b>Webmaster</b>	Ruth Blake
<b>Swarm Liaison</b>	See BBKA Website
<b>Librarian</b>	Angus Basil assisted by Julie Elkin
<b>AST Members and Team Leaders</b>	to be arranged at a later date

## BBKA MODULE ONE - STUDY GROUP

Chris Utting is organising a study group to look at the BBKA Module One 'Honey Bee Management' with a view to either just improving your knowledge or taking the written 90 minute examination in March 2014.

The group will follow the BBKA syllabus which includes hive types, frame spacing, wax foundation, starting up, apiary and colony selection, apiary hygiene, bee temperament, the year's work, forage, drifting, feeding, honey, pollen, swarming and collection, nucs, uniting, seasonal management, moving, clearing, uniting, wintering, stings and first aid.

Full details of the syllabus will be found on the BBKA website [www.britishbeekeepers.com](http://www.britishbeekeepers.com) Follow the links **LEARN – EXAMS & ASSESSMENTS - MODULES – MODULE 1 2014 SYLLABUS** (note that the bold style in the syllabus indicates a new or updated section)

We already have two members, Cathy Backway and Mave Dowling, who want to take part in the group and will welcome a few more.

We are planning to meet at Kay Thomas' house in South Molton but if there are more than five students then we will arrange to meet in the Small Room of the Castle Centre, Castle Street, Barnstaple from 7.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m. (including a coffee/tea break), starting in January 2014. Dates are yet to be arranged. But we may change our meeting location depending on the area where most of the students live.

We will be meeting for six evenings following the five BBKA Correspondence Course lessons with a sixth evening for revision. It is suggested that some members may wish to enrol as a correspondence course candidate with the BBKA Correspondence Course Secretary. The application form can be downloaded from the BBKA website. The fee is £50.00 and you will be attached to your own course tutor, a BBKA Master Beekeeper, who will mark your answer papers.

The first part of the evening will cover a discussion on the syllabus and the remainder will look at typical exam questions taken from actual exam papers and the answers. There will be no homework set.

The cost of the 12 hour course is has yet to be calculated depending on where we meet. But it will be enough to cover printing, refreshments and the room hire (if needed).

If you would like to join us or would like to the discuss the idea please 'phone Chris on 01237 474 500 or Cathy on 01271 858 236.

## Retirement of Peter Auger – Our Seasonal Bee Inspector



Barbara wishing Peter a happy retirement and thanking him for all he has done for the Branch over 14 years as our SBI

I remember that it was about fourteen years ago when Peter and I were having a chat about the advert for a Seasonal Bee Inspector. He was thinking about applying and fortunately I was able to convince him to try. He got it. Richard Ball was the Regional Bee Inspector for the southwest and Peter became part of his team. He could not have had a better boss.

Before he got the job he was a very experienced beekeeper. After his training we were lucky that his area although covering much of the southwest counties always included the patch of the North Devon Branch. He lives nearly next door to me and we soon became good friends.

Although he was supposed to work only a five day week he was always available at the end of the 'phone to give advice and to visit a member to check the bees and help out with our problems. His job was just to check the colonies for Foul Brood diseases etc. but Peter was always prepared to do a lot more.

Peter has a claim to fame. In 1992 in Torquay Branch apiary during a training course they found the first varroa mite in the UK. The treatment was to insert Bayvarol strips; the golden bullet. But the experts predicted that the varroa would become resistant in ten years. They were spot on. In 1992 Peter found the first resistant mites in a hive on the North Devon/Cornwall border. The world of varroa treatment in the UK changed for ever.

The National Bee Unit has 'sentinel apiaries' scattered around the coast. They are used to identify when we are being invaded by exotic pests such as the Small Hive Beetle and the Asian Hornet. Peter has set up Horestone apiary as a 'sentinel apiary'.

I have worked with several bee inspectors over many years and Peter stands out as one of the best. He will be missed as our friendly inspector. I would like to thank him on behalf of the North Devon Branch members for all his help and assistance over the years. I look forward to helping him enjoy his retirement.

*Chris Utting*

A message from Peter Auger:

*"I would like to thank the apiary members for their support and help over my past years as a bee inspector. I was really surprised by your kind gesture and gifts at the AGM and would like to thank all those people who made that possible. I will try to help out more at the apiary next season, given the time."*

## Entente Cordiale



I've noticed before in France that every market, regardless of size, has at least one local honey stall. This summer, holidaying in the Maritime Alps (fly from Bristol to Nice with Easyjet), there were markets and honey stalls in abundance. Having seen this lovely Citroen, I went in search of its owner and was rewarded by a fantastic jar of honey (5 euros for 250g) and a conversation with the *apiculteur*.

The honey was an amazing dark brown colour: in addition to the wild flower pastures, the bees had foraged

amongst the chestnut trees which adds an unmistakable *gout* to the honey. In answer to my basic *Combien de ruches avez-vous?*, I learned that there were fifty hives spread through the meadows and forests of the Oustal which the beekeepers had built up over the last 10 years. The spring of 2013 was harsh with snow in the foothills as late as May so they were not experiencing the comparatively good weather that we had in England.

My bee-related French vocabulary improved dramatically over the fortnight – so I will share another conversation next month ....



*Sue Madgwick*

## Topical Tips for December – January

- Regularly check that the mouseguards are in position as badgers can cause damage; use plenty of drawing pins using the hivetool to push; this avoids the problem of the pin breaking through into your thumb
- December is too late to do anything about stores; this should have been done in October; it is now too cold for the bees to produce and manipulate wax to seal the cells, leaving a risk of fermentation of the sugar syrup; however, if Ambrosia syrup is used this will not ferment but it is probably too cold for the bees to reach the feeder
- Keep the hive entrance at least 12”(600mm) above ground level avoiding the damp air; colonies cannot deal with dampness.
- Remove, entrance blocks, varroa floor inserts and any insulation under the roof; place match sticks under each corner of the crown board; if the colony is cold this keeps the bees inactive and they do not consume their stores; metabolic water condenses under the roof and can be used to dilute the honey from 18% to 50% water content – the ideal strength for immediate consumption
- To deter the Green Woodpecker attacking a hive put a large plastic rubbish sack over the complete hive; this will make it difficult for the bird to take hold; it can peck holes up to 2” (55mm) in size; if the woodpecker is a major problem consider surrounding the hive in galvanised chicken wire with a gap of 6” (300mm), or find another apiary
- In early January the brood area is very small and there is no drone brood; the varroa mite has a limited number of cells in which to breed so is exposed and vulnerable; drizzle 5ml (teaspoon) 3.2% oxalic acid in sugar syrup over the cluster ensuring that the solution is warmed to about 35°C; the ‘Trickle 2’ applicator holds 100ml and is very convenient and easy to use
- Do not give the colony a Xmas present of a jar of honey; feeding in mid-winter may encourage the queen to start laying resulting in chilled brood when the temperature drops and the cluster tightens
- With a layer of snow do not get concerned to see dozens of dead bees around the apiary; this is normal but cannot be seen in grass; if the snow is deep keep the entrance clear to enable the colony to breath
- Lift the roof and check for hibernating queen wasps – a favourite site – and a simple way of keeping a control if the wasps are a nuisance

## and . . . Disturbing October Varroa Drop

If you reflect on the last winter/summer seasonal weather it has been well away from the average. In my own 20 colonies and the dozen Horestone colonies the natural varroa drop throughout the summer has been exceptionally low.

When the summer did eventually arrive it was a good beekeeping summer. The colonies expanded and the nectar was flowing but in some areas the floral periods were shorter with late dandelion overlapping with early clover.

Generally the floral and the honeybee season has been developing about a month later than normal. The colony population usually peaks in July and the varroa a month later. This may explain why we are now seeing heavier natural varroa drops and colonies that are stronger than usual.

Have a look at Bill Ainsworth's website diary on <http://www.blackbees.co.uk/>

*Chris Utting*

Edited by Jeff Orr, e-mail [jeffjorr@aol.com](mailto: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.***

**THE NEXT ISSUE WILL BE FEBRUARY 2014**