

NORTHERN LIGHTS

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

December 2014

www.northdevonbees.org



Chair Chat

I was unable to attend the AGM on 16th November but still managed to be elected 'Chair' for the coming year. Thank you to all who voted for me.

I am fairly new to the North Devon Branch but I have, over the past four years, met many members. I have participated in courses, assisted at shows and regularly helped with the weekly beekeeping at Horestone Apiary so I have acquired some insight into the running of the Branch. The challenge now is to continue the good work of our previous Chair, Sylvie, and to lead the new committee towards a successful year in 2015.

The new committee is meeting on 2nd December when 'the way forward' will be discussed and, I hope, manageable decisions formulated.

Horestone Apiary is quiet at this time of the year. The bees have been out when the weather has allowed them to fly. The site is damp, autumnal and slippery in places. The hives are checked weekly. We are hoping that all will be well with the colonies in the spring ready for the new season.

Thank you to all the retiring and re-elected members, and to all our supporters for the hard work and commitment put in during 2014.

Mave

Events 2014

2 Dec	12:00 onwards	Mince Pie Day, Horestone
5 Dec	19:00- 21:30	Skittles Evening, Plough Inn, Bickington

Bee Quotes

'There are certain pursuits which, if not wholly poetic and true, do at least suggest a nobler and finer relationship to nature than we know. The keeping of bees, for instance.'

Henry David Thoreau



The 95th Annual General Meeting

Thank you to those that attended the AGM last month. We welcomed Barry Neal, Gen. Sec of the DBKA and Ruth Neal, Show Chairman, who joined us for the meeting.



Alan Barrow receiving the Bernard Pritchard Trophy (class 11 – Novice Honey) and the Croyde Cup (best exhibit in Class 1 – Light Run Honey)



We heard reports from the following Branch Officers, Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Apiary Co-ordinator, Education Officer and our Show and Social events Co-ordinator. The reports highlighted what a full and busy year 2014 had been. Chrissie Preece was thanked for her hard work organizing the Shows

and looking after us at Horestone. We all wish her well during the bee venom desensitisation programme she will be starting soon. We hope to see her back at Horestone before too long.



Derek Hunter – NDBKA Branch Trophy (most points in Honey Classes 1 – 10)

The Election of Officers has now set us up with a 2015 Committee headed by our new Chair Mave Dowling. We wish them a successful year – and I hope you will all support the new committee wherever you can. Other post holders will be adopted at the first Committee meeting.



Sylvia Barber, The Hustwayte Plate, most points in the Cookery classes



Martin Hadrill being presented with the Basic Bee-keeping Certificate

Ruth Neal helped to present the trophies won at the Branch Honey Show.

She finished by encouraging us to consider exhibiting honey and wax products at the Devon County Show as well as our Branch Show. She said that the deadline for registering for the Show is April 23rd. She also encouraged us to gain experience and widen our knowledge by volunteering as stewards.

Ruth spoke of Jack Mummery's achievements at the National Honey Show – he won the Harry Riches Memorial Trophy and the Millennium Cup for mead as well as 15 other awards.

The meeting finished with our usual feast of homemade cakes and tea.

Sylvie

Challenging Conventional Beekeeping

In 2010 I was given a book and told 'read this, once won't be enough, you will find a revelation. They were right, it was and still is a book to challenge conventional in the simplest, most logical and satisfying way I have ever come across. The book?.....Tim Rowe's THE ROSE HIVE METHOD.

After reading the thought provoking article in November's Northern Lights I again decided that in all I have seen, heard and read of Warre hives with their quaint, slightly wonky look there is still a fussiness about them that belies their claims of simplicity – Warre worshippers will take me to task for such blasphemy! Tim Rowe (an Irish beekeeper with c 100 hives) manages his bees with health, increase and honey productions as his priorities, in that order, and believes that a lot of the pressures that honey bees labour under are the cause of their problems and declining numbers and that a simpler, more bee friendly system is needed. He lists practices altering the bees natural patterns of behaviour, used almost universally since the advent of the moveable comb hive, such as coercing them into different sized boxes within a hive, using queen excluders which limit the queen's freedom to roam and inhibit the spread of her pheromones, the use of imprinted foundation which can alter the ratio of drones to worker and too much sugar being fed in place of natural stores as being the cause of this stress.

So how does the Rose hive method address these issues? The boxes are very simple, all the same size, 460mm square, 190mm deep so equivalent to a National brood and a super cut in half, and you stack them up as the colony expands without the use of a restrictive queen excluder. They fit in with the National & Commercial floorboards, crownboards and roofs so it is very easy to convert to using Rose boxes. Each box holds 12 Hoffman style frames which can be used with wired foundation, starter strips or let the bees draw them completely. Combs are arranged so there is a gap for bees to move freely about, below and all around each comb. This all makes management very straightforward, the bees move freely through the hive and to see the brood nest expanding and retracting in true centenary shape through the season is fascinating although I have also had queens lay up a box literally wall to wall as well. Combs may need to be sorted and removed individu-

ally for extraction but that is not a problem, many of us do that with our nationals when using them without queen excluders. The downside to this size box when full of capped honey (48 lbs) is the weight especially to an ageing beekeeper and the box must be divided.

The lack of queen excluder worries some beekeepers but she is still most likely to be found on the comb on which she is currently laying if you need to find her. The bees may 'waste' the odd comb intended for cut comb but this year one of my 'Roses' produced a whole blemish free boxful of cut comb. If you need to you can spin out these natural combs for re use. Comb change is simple, forget Bailey and Shook swarm, work the old comb up to the top of the stack and remove the whole box for rendering, place the new foundation for drawing between the other boxes. This is hard the first time you do it when you have been brought up on the maxim 'don't split the brood nest' but it doesn't seem to bother the bees who draw the comb out very fast indeed.

Swarm control is easy as the boxes lend themselves readily to 'vertical Pagden' and it can work even when you can't find the queen. Increase too is simple, just divide up the boxes.

Bees winter happily on 1-3 boxes according to the colony size.

So all round less stress for bees and beekeeper which can only be good and I'm not the only old beekeeper in the area to be bowled by Tim Rowe's ideas and rush to put them into practise.

Julie



In the library: *Some Alternative Pathways for the He-sistant Queen Rearer* by Ben Harden

This quite little book contains an amazing wealth of information and encouragement to 'give Queen rearing a go' as the title suggests. It is concise and well laid out with clear diagrams and photos introducing the various ways of Queen rearing even though having decided on a method you would probably need to refer to another book with more detailed step by step explanations.

Ben emphasises the importance of understanding the basic biology of queen cell production for both swarming and supercedure, especially the timings involved and working with the bees natural inclinations. Equally important is the selecting of the best queens for breeding based on your hive records. He describes the commercial queen rearing kits and grafting tools available giving the pros and cons of each type. He is very persuasive that grafting is easy, satisfying and can be done by anyone although does say the ladies generally display a greater facility for this fine intricate work!

The use of mini nucs (Apideas) and 4/5 frame nucs for rearing and mating are well covered and he has some useful tips for queen introduction, a stage when some beekeepers find all their work wasted when a colony rejects a new queen. Ben's method of re queening a vicious colony **without** having to find the queen is excellent and the book worth borrowing for this alone if you have ever struggled to find and despatch a queen from a ferocious colony.

At a time when queen imports seem to be greater than ever bringing the risk of more imported pests into our colonies (SHB is almost here) this is the time to borrow this book and plan some simple home grown queen replacements in the coming season.

Julie

Who's this?



Yes, it's a young Albert Cannon seeing to the Club House at Horestone (it was a chicken shed in a previous life). The Club House has been further improved over the years as you can see from the second photo below.

This is of course the last edition of NL for this year and there is no edition in January. I am hoping to start a member's letters to the Editor section in the February 2015 NL, so please e mail me with your comments, observations and questions, hopefully bee or Branch related.

Jeff



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.

(don't forget your letters to the Editor)