

NORTHERN LIGHTS

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

February 2007

www.northdevonbees.org



Editorial

Let's All Go Down to Somerset

Since my tearful plea for a sucker (sorry, responsible person) to take over the role of Newsletter Editor of Northern Lights has fallen on deaf ears, here I am, an outcast in deepest Somerset, still producing North Devon's Newsletter. Heigh Ho!

I should start by declaring that I am totally unrepentant at the long delay in producing this newsletter. If you knew what trauma I have gone through in moving all my accumulated flotsam and jetsam from my old home to our new one near Chard, and then wrestling with BT to get my telephone and broadband connection working well I won't bore you.

Actually, I'm only just in Somerset, and my nearest Beekeeping Branch is in Axminster – home of East Devon Branch. It also turns out that not one but two of my neighbours are also beekeepers and Bill Lawson, who only lives a couple of houses away, very kindly invited me to a Winter meeting of the East Devon Branch on Wednesday. So I went along to see how they conducted their business.

Unsurprisingly, it was very similar to the way North Devon conduct theirs. I was made very welcome, sat with 22 other members whilst Peter Ball gave a talk about Beekeeping in Malta (see article on page 4), browsed through their beekeeping library, was treated to a cup of tea (and several biscuits) and given a lift home.

What I did find surprising however was the general admiration (and I suspect quite a bit of well concealed envy) of our Horestone Apiary. A significant number of the members had visited it and all the members I spoke to mentioned that we were very lucky to have such a superb facility at our disposal.

People like myself, who are relative newcomers to beekeeping, probably take the existence of the Horestone Apiary and its facilities very much for granted. Be aware, however, that most other Branches have nothing like it and we should treasure what we have. Long may it prosper, but it will only do so if we all contribute a little time and effort in ensuring that it does.

Kevin Tricker

Chairman's Notes

I have been contacted by Ann Brampton from the Holsworthy branch and she has asked me to let everyone know that they are holding their Spring Convention on March 24. Anyone needing /wanting to know more can contact her on 01409 261152. Although I have never been, I understand from those who have that it's very good and I'll try to go this year. Details will be in next month's newsletter.

2007 Subscriptions

These are now overdue. Don't forget that your Bee Insurance only applies if you are a fully paid up member of the Association. If you have lost your form or are a new member, the Application Form and the Gift Aid Declaration can be downloaded from our web site; or you can pick them up from Horestone Apiary or directly from Dave James.

The bees are flying everyday and I see them foraging on our quince with great enthusiasm. This was a timely reminder to check my hive stores. They were fine but a couple need careful monitoring. Everything seems to be nearly a month early so hopefully as the brood starts increasing there will be plenty

of forage for them but with snow forecast for the whole country we might have to start the spring feeds early this year.

This is also a good time to make any last minute equipment checks and repairs, as the spring inspection could well need to be done early.

Take care

Chris T

Horestone Apiary: New Lease

A growing concern in recent years has been the rather uncertain and thus unsatisfactory legal status of our Branch Apiary - that is, its lease or otherwise.

This worry has increased at the very same time we have been greatly enhancing the Apiary facilities, and planning yet more, heightening the risk of severe disruption and added costs should we have had to move for any reason beyond our control.

Fortunately, we now have a new tenancy agreement being signed off, which gives us far greater security and comfort. It is for 20 years, with a crucial 18 month's. minimum notice either side. I'll spare you the other details, but this is a very welcome change, and we are grateful to the Maxse ('Chichester') estate for the very reasonable rental level and other terms agreed.

Dave J

Apiary Manager's Report

Horestone is looking very beautiful at the moment, our intrepid grounds man has cleared away more trees and bushes, and he has opened up the area where we had the apideas last year which makes the place look much bigger. We have definite signs of an early spring with a very good crop of Snowdrops. Two weeks ago, we saw workers bringing in pollen with many bees flying. Last Tuesday it was much colder with very few bees venturing out.

In the next two weeks we will be forming our new Apiary support team. This will replace last year's apiary sub committee and will incorporate the former show committee. Hopefully this support team will be more streamlined, It will have our long standing Beekeeping gurus and other members and with luck some co-opted team members to get us through what I hope will be a fruitful and busy year.

Soon we will have access to the interest free loan money and will be ordering the new roofing components and hope to start the replacement sooner rather than later. We have decided to concentrate on the outer shell, completing that before we look at revamping the inner sanctum.

A small working party is preparing to start the awkward job of shoring up and strengthening the bouncing floor in the quartermasters store. The new security arrangements are now completed, and the alarms tested and working. All the buildings are now alarmed. We have a large amount of beekeeping equipment. Should anyone other than a support team member need to have access to any building, a telephone call to David James, myself or Chris Tozer would be advisable.

On Tuesday 20th, we are expecting a delegation of beekeepers from Tavistock branch, joining us for our usual Tuesday meeting. Parking may be tight, but the more the merrier !!

Tony

Treasurer's Thoughts

Getting stuck into this new job, and acting as an assistant secretary for a little while yet, reinforced my view that there is misunderstanding by some members on the usage of their annual fees. I thought I'd include a few thoughts on this and connected issues. Hopefully members will not shoot the messenger, so to speak. I - and other Committee members - would welcome comments, especially if they relate to any views on BBKA and DBKA capitations and value for money, or on e-mail usage.

First, thanks indeed to all who have paid their new annual subscriptions already ! And to those who haven't yet, please don't forget, get them in soon ! And also read the text below on Gift Aid. And if you know of

potential new members uncertain of the costs or joining mechanics, download a copy of the subs. form from our web site or give me a call on 01769 561 002 for snail-mail copies.

Well, I guess most members realise that the greater proportion of their £28 stays with the Branch, yep ? Wrong, I am afraid ! The BDI insurance (to 3 hives) and Branch components are about equal, not even a fiver ! The rest is split roughly equally between the mandatory BBKA and DBKA capitations. If you make a donation specifically to the Branch, it gets all of this, of course. And if you complete the simple Gift Aid section of the subs. form, we do, in due course, get all of this additional sum back from Customs & Revenue via the Devon Association - and remember that this additional amount is actually some 20% more than the near fiver that the Branch gets in the first place out of your £28 ! Get the picture ? Please don't spurn the Gift Aid request lightly - and I doubt very much that many members pay no taxes at all, or to be precise less than a tenner annually.

So what happens, for example, to the DBKA sums over time - after the costs of 'Beekeeping' and so on ? They accumulate ! In fact, this Branch has started to quietly question the relatively high level of cash held 'centrally' by DBKA. Should some of this not be returned to the Branches and/or capitations decreased ? Well, in the meantime, the Branch has recently been provided with an interest free loan (IFL) for £2,300 over 3.5 years for the repair, refurbishment and upgrading of the three sheds at Horestone Apiary. We could even soon rename the main shed, the Meeting Hall ! Yes, from DBKA, as requested.

In considering also the levels of cash held separately by the Devon Branches themselves, it seems that - like the Association centrally - each Branch on average holds a level of cash over three times that which we have or which might be considered prudent by the Charity Commission, even though we are the largest Branch. Reason ? I think it is because we do more. Having said that, our fund raising should get a welcome boost now by a new venture; see the separate item in this issue (new lottery.)

Finally, I'd welcome inputs on planned greater use of electronic communications by the Branch, especially e-mail. Unless I hear to the contrary I'd like to send subscription receipts out by e-mail. And I'd like to generally see the Branch use e-mails and the 'horestoneapiary' Yahoo! site more to better alert members of upcoming events, news items, organise task groups and in many cases save money. Some members, for example, would be quite happy to receive this newsletter - or just an announcement carrying the web link (URL) to it - by e-mail rather than as a snail-mailed paper version.

Dave J

Cuprinol Wood Preservers for Beehives

As indicated a few months ago, the only wood preserver approved in the UK for use on hives viz. the clear Cuprinol one - as sold by CoB ('Bitz4Bees'), for example - had its formulation changed, and new tests were being conducted by the NBU, commissioned by the research arm of the parent company, ICI.

The good news is that these tests are now complete, and the product - together with the red cedar versions, too - seems satisfactory. I copy here key extracts of the final ICI formal summary release sent us

"This represents from today onwards ... the official ICI advice on use of wood preservers on bee hives.

Due to EU legislation Cuprinol has had to change the active ingredients which are used in its wood preservers. Previous formulations had been tested on bee hives but it was not possible to test the new formulation before it was launched. Cuprinol has subsequently commissioned a study at the National Bee Unit of the Central Science Laboratory to evaluate this new formulation and whether this can be given approval for use on bee-hives. Cuprinol Garden Wood Preserver (DP) Red Cedar and Cuprinol Trade Decorative Wood Preserver (T) Red Cedar were applied by brush application and Cuprinol Trade Low Odour Wood Preserver Clear (T) was applied by dip coating. In all cases treated hive parts showed no toxicity (up to 6 weeks from treatment) to bees or brood after exposure to these hive parts compared with untreated control hive components. Additionally, no adverse behavioural effects, e.g. excessive fanning at the entrance, aggressive behaviour were seen in any of the treated colonies. No other colours were tested and although we can see no reason for any difference in behaviour of different colours it is only the products and application methods listed that have been studied by the NBU. The Cuprinol recommendation to any customer wanting to treat a beehive should thus be that they either brush apply Cuprinol Garden Wood Preserver (DP) Red Cedar or Cuprinol Trade Decorative Wood Preserver (T) Red Cedar or dip apply Cuprinol Trade Low Odour Wood Preserver Clear (T)."

Dave J

Community of Beekeepers Ltd Awards Share Grant

At a little ceremony recently beside the new CoB ('Bitz4Bees') container store in Umberleigh, a share certificate was presented to Mr John Seage by CoB's chairman, Tony Wright. This followed a recent unanimous board decision to grant a number of ordinary shares to John in recognition of his support to the Company in hosting the new stores on his site for free, and also his considerable help and generosity in several associated matters.

The Company first became aware of John when the Instrumented Hive Partnership came to an agreement with him over sharing his broadband internet connectivity, and

Tony presents John with his share certificate. Inset - a close-up of John



his hosting of the necessary hardware, all in order to provide the IHP, the Branch and then Sam Gosling with broadband provision at Horestone via a link across the Taw valley. He and his dad - who can remember Sam's cottage well in the days of horse and carts - visited Horestone last year and have taken quite an interest in our many beekeeping activities since.

New Lottery Planned

Your Branch Committee recently agreed to a proposal for a new lottery scheme to be introduced to help raise Branch funds. This followed a proposal from the IHP, which is quite independent and funded separately, for a joint lottery. The year before last, Kevin S organised a '100 Club' type lottery which raised a substantial sum. Last year this was not done, and our financial situation was much the worse as a result. (See also the separate article in this issue on a few Treasurer's thoughts).

A suitable lottery license is now in place, and our new member Wendy Dunlop-Jenkins is the official promoter. The greater part of the proceeds will come to the Branch, and the smaller part to the IHP. The intention is to widen the customer base, so to speak, so that our membership - or worse, a subset - do not carry the full burden yet again for most of our fund-raising.

This new lottery is again patterned after the popular '100 Club' model used by many charities, with a decently high level of monthly cash prizes. But it will target the general public in N Devon, not just beekeepers. We are very fortunate to have Wendy take on the role of Fund Raising Officer, for she has plenty of relevant experience (and enthusiasm!). This lottery should enable us to generate a significant core input on a medium term basis, with regular monthly payments and good forward visibility at all times. Importantly, the expenses will be trivially small, and it should also provide a little additional publicity for the Branch.

The name of the new lottery? The details, and how you can help? Look out for next month's issue!

How to make a Maltese (Bee) Cross

As I mentioned in my editorial, thanks to East Devon Branch I had occasion recently to attend a talk by Peter Ball (National Bee Inspector) on his recent visits to Malta to provide Maltese beekeepers with some pearls of his accumulated wisdom. I cannot in all honesty impart to you all the details of his very interesting observations, but I will try to outline some of the highlights. (Apologies for any lapses or errors in my memory !)

Malta and its associated neighbouring island of Gozo are together roughly the same size as the Isle of Wight, but contain significantly more beekeepers (and they have a much larger population). There are approximately 2000 colonies in Malta and Gozo. All beekeepers have to be registered (although there are a few "illegal" ones).

Beekeeping has been a major source of income in the islands for centuries and they were conquered or raided several times in the past, purely because of that rich source of honey. In fact the name Malta comes from the Greek/Roman name for honey.

Despite significant levels of poverty and low wages (approximately one third of the UK), Maltese Thyme Honey can sell for as much as £6.70 a pound – significantly more than heather honey in the UK. Making a reasonable income from beekeeping is therefore more viable in Malta, although there are only about 6 beekeepers with over 50 colonies. This value has however a downside - some problems have been experienced with unscrupulous traders mixing local honey with cheap imports and selling it off as local produce.

There are three honey harvests – one in Feb to April (wildflowers), one in July (wild thyme) and one in September (eucalyptus, carob etc.). The last of these, due to the "unique" flavour, is often left on for the bees.

Brood is produced throughout the year, the population levels are lowest in July/August. There are no winter losses as we know it - summer is the dangerous time for colonies, due to the excessive heat.

Nowadays, removable frame national type hives (all locally made, as imported hives are too expensive) are the most common type of hive, although up until the 1950s, traditional clay pots (called a Qolla) were used. These were normally fitted into hole in the walls of a roofed stone structure (called a Migba). Clay pot "supers" (Zeida) could also be fitted.

Pests and diseases are very similar to the UK, although the local wasp and the death's head moth are particular problems. The varroa found in Malta are also not yet resistant to Bayvarol.

If you are interested, further information can be got from www.geocities.com/maltabee01/index.htm

Many thanks to Peter Ball for an interesting talk and some fine photographs. I noticed however that he never mentioned the local wine – doubtless he has rather hazy recollections of that !!

Kevin T

PS So, what does make a Maltese bee cross ? Well, anybody who wastes their thyme, of course.

Additions/Reminders for Your Diary

Wednesday 24th February

President of DBKA, Dr Mick Street, will speak on "Drones" at the Castle Centre, 7.30pm. Shared Supper and raffle as usual

Thursday 8th March

Final evening meeting of the season will be a talk by DBKA Chairman Bill Finnemore. The subject - "How I Prepare for the Coming Season." 7.30pm at the Castle Centre, Barnstaple.

You might also like to note two further dates -

The **Somerset Lecture Day** on Sat 17th February at War Memorial Hall, Draycott, nr Cheddar.

The **DBKA AGM** on Saturday 17th March

Beeswax Wanted

Beeswax wanted for candlemaking.

£2.50 to £3.50 per pound paid, depending on condition.

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For Sale:

Traditional Tamworth breed, outdoor reared pork, bacon and sausages.

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Contact *Ruth Blake*. 01805 601330

Newsletter Editor Required

I'm still looking for someone to take over this role for North Devon, as it is not really practical for me to continue this role now that I have left the Area. As before, anybody interested can contact me for information.

Kevin Tricker

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All contributions welcome, copy by 23rd of month for publication in following month's newsletter.

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