

NORTHERN LIGHTS

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

February 2008

www.northdevonbees.org



Chairman's Chat

Well we are into February. We blink and another month goes by. February that month when all things become manifest. The realisation that all those winter jobs that we were going to do are not done. The realisation that bees may be in a perilous state and we cannot look and even if we could there is nothing we can do. That snowdrops etc are beginning to bloom and the rain is still horizontal. It is all so *öI wish it was Aprilö*.

February however must be faced; it really is the start of the new bee year, fingers must be crossed, and we must stoically wait for the spring catapult that will launch us, (for good or ill) into another year, another year of joy and wonderment that is beekeeping.

Jim Slade

Apiary Managers Report

The adverse weather has prohibited any involvement with the bees other than the usual checking the natural *varroa* drop the counts are still high but slowly decreasing.

The same constant rain has somewhat hindered our willing workforce, whilst not putting them off altogether getting wet seems to be the order of the day. The water system is all ready for connection and would have been so had we not had an incompatible mixture of pipes and fittings.

It was decided by the Apiary Support Team that moving the Branch library into Horestone was a priority and must be completed before the winter course began. To that end it was moved to the top of our refurbishment list. The cabinets loaned to us by Dave James would have been more than adequate to accommodate the library but might not have been secure enough. We agreed that a built-in storage facility would be better but guess what?: it would cost much more. The alterations were worked on by a small team over this last weekend and are just about complete, apart from decoration, security, shelving and steel skirting strips (to make it mouse proof).

The courageous gardening team and helpers have been working extra time and cleared another area to the right of the I.H.P. cabin. The squirrels are enjoying the bulbs the team set a few weeks ago. I feel we might have cause to miss Sam's dog (can't remember his name, or my own for that matter) before too long; whilst he could be a tad annoying with his exuberance, he did keep us fairly free of some of the rodents.

If you are contemplating throwing out last years white plastic patio chairs and table, think of the Apiary; we will be happy to collect and give them a home.

Tony Wright

Musings from our Treasurer

I wrote a brief article here about a year ago on how our subscriptions are made up, and broadly how we raise funds over the year, how important the GAD completion is for members when completing the annual membership form, and so on. In particular, and clearly to the surprise of many of our members, I pointed out that for our own Branch purposes we receive less than 20 % of the baseline £28 sum., the majority of the subscription representing capitation fees to BBKA and DBKA (some £20 together) and the valuable BDI (insurance) premium. Of course the GAD-derived reclaim from HMRC crucially delivers the Branch an additional sum a little bigger than this 20 % figure. Members will have their own views on the value for money we and our Branch derive from these fees to our county and national bodies, and I for one greatly value our county "Beekeeping" magazine and yearbook. But here I'd like to take the opportunity to comment simply on the reserve funds held by DBKA and ourselves. Nothing new here, but perhaps an orthogonal view for us and our Branch Committee to consider....again.

Generally this Branch tries to maintain a prudent reserve of some £1,000 most of the time, although there is no formal policy in effect. In fact from last year we use a new, very high interest account for this and switch cash funds to this judiciously from time to time to generate higher levels of useful interest. We are the largest Branch in Devon, and each Branch holds various levels of such reserves. But In addition, the county (DBKA) holds an amount centrally in its reserves which equates to around £40 for each individual Devon member. This equates to about a decade's worth of our Branch capitation sum (the 20% of our £28 subs., as above), or a half decade's worth of DBKA capitation fees. These 'central' reserves seem quite high to me, as do some other Branch reserves.

Just in case you feel queasy on this figure, consider how much each man, woman and child in the UK has at risk in terms of loan and guarantee obligations to Northern Crock and its customers. As I write this Darling and Brown still dither on handling this, but the figure is a staggering £1,000 for each and every one of us ! Hmmm..... but that is actually only ~ twenty times the figure we as DBKA members have held in our name as central, not Branch, reserves ! I'd welcome comments.

Oh yes, we did secure an interest free loan a year ago from DBKA (no grant possible), for upgrading of our Apiary facilities, and we shall soon have paid of 3/7ths of this sum.

Dave James

PS Please send in your subs. if not done so already ! !

EDITORIAL

During a rainy afternoon I sorted out the many leaflets and magazines which I have received in the past 4 years concerning the state and the care of bees. Not to throw them out but to put them in a more tidy condition, there were lots of them. It led me to consider the merit of our own North Devon Newsletter. Of course you want to know what is happening at the Apiary, its development and the reports from the committee, but what is really important is the experience of individuals, their views and thoughts.

Nearly 2 years ago at a wax workshop much talk was given to having a blog. You have the email addresses so get typing, so we can put the question/comments in the next newsletter to start a dialogue.

We will be contacting you on an ad-hoc basis for your contribution to the newsletter whether they are controversial, informative or just silly. This is your news letter we are only here to serve.

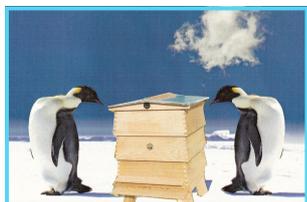
Lessons learnt from real experience are worth a thousand workshops.

If you are going to the talk on the 2nd March please consider car sharing (more fun as well) but not just for then, but also the education evenings, the Tuesday afternoons and any other times.

Mel & Sylvie

PS I am sure you have all paid your subscription by now, but if not please do so.

WET WARM WINTERS



It has been some years now since we have had to concern ourselves with keeping the hive entrance clear of snow (or protecting the hives from inquisitive penguins). However this warmer weather brings its own problems. In very cold weather, with a tight cluster, the bees consume very little of their stores but with rising temperatures and increased activity significantly higher levels of stores are consumed. It has always been quoted that a colony needs 35 lbs of honey to survive the winter months, however with warmer winters, and in the South of England, it is suggested that 45 lbs might be a better estimate.

If we do suffer losses how do we know that it was starvation they succumbed to. The telltale sign is that on opening the hive, dead bees will be found with their heads deep in the cells where they had been looking for food. Sometimes larval and pupa skins can be found outside the hives the starving bees have sucked them dry. If we are unfortunate enough to have such losses all we can do is to learn from it. Next year we must either leave them with more honey or increase the amount of sugar syrup given to them.

Sylvie & Mel

Northern Lights distribution; final reminder

Please read this carefully, as it relates to the immediate change - after this issue - to the distribution policy for *Northern Lights*, as readers were again reminded in the December '07 issue. Your Branch Committee has an agreed policy to migrate those members who are happy to receive electronic copy versions only of *Northern Lights* so to do.

All recipients of the more informal *Messenger*, i.e. all members with valid e-mail addresses on our master e-mail list, will in due course be assumed to have agreed to receive soft copy versions only of *Northern Lights* unless they indicate otherwise (by e-mail preferably, or 'phone).

All members will in any case continue to receive material from BBKA and DBKA in paper form as at present.

In short, if you have a broadband enabled, valid e-mail address, please let us know if you wish to additionally receive a paper copy of *Northern Lights* as now. Those few members with e-mail facilities but without broadband need to inform us, too, so that paper copies of *N Lights* will continue to be sent, and so that other communications by e-mail may be tailored to the lowest sizes.

Dave James & Denise Oldaker

Honey Roasted Peppers

Serves 4 as a starter or with salad for a lunch.

2 red peppers 1 clove garlic finely chopped
2 yellow peppers 2 tbsps runny honey
16 cherry tomatoes basil leaves to garnish
Salt & black pepper to taste

1. Preheat the oven to 200c, 400F gas mark 6
2. Cut the peppers in half and remove the seeds. Place the peppers on a roasting tray.
3. Cut the cherry tomatoes in half and place inside the peppers. Sprinkle with the garlic, add the salt and pepper to taste and drizzle with the runny honey.
4. Place in the oven and roast for 20 minutes until the peppers are soft.
5. Garnish with basil and serve warm or cold with a few salad leaves.

"100s Lottery Club"

Winners of the September - December lottery draws of the North Devon Beekeepers 100s Lottery are as follows:

September	1st	Chris Utting
	2nd	George Lake
October	1st	George Lake
	2nd	Ruth Neal
November	1st	George Lake (donated to the garden)
	2nd	P Warrillow
December	1st	Ruth Neal
	2nd	Beryl Smailes

The A to Bee of IHP

Chris Tozer, vice chairman, has kindly responded to requests from members and the Branch Committee to provide a little updated information on this, by means of a brief Questions and Answers session (i.e. Chris talking with Dave James of the IHP).

I hear different names, including 'Instrumental'?

Can you tell us a little more?

IHP is simply the Instrumented Hive Partnership, which is expected to change very shortly to the Instrumented Hive Project when we become a registered charity.

Who are the members ?

The four founder members were Michael Duncan, Kevin Stach, Tony Wright and myself. We have now been joined by Jim Slade and more recently John Baxter. One or two more are likely. The IHP is looking for new members, but it's clear they must be 'adequately obsessive' (!) although necessarily established beekeepers.

Is it part of North Devon Branch ?

No, it is not. The Branch would not be able to supply enough funds, and it is unlikely anyway that the majority of Branch members would be willing to sanction such a level of commitment for activities which are rather more specialist. The IHP has not cost the Branch any money; in fact it contributes financially a modest sum to the Branch, and provide certain specified support

Is it a charity ?

No, but it should be registered so shortly

What are its general aims ?

Broadly, to study bees as social insects. Unlike DARG, we do not claim to do research, just studies that we consider useful and/or interesting.

Does the North Devon Branch support it financially ?

No, see above

Does *Bitz4Bees* support it financially ?

No. The Community of Beekeepers (*Bitz4Bees*) does provide some financial support to the Branch, though. And IHP members are quite active in supporting the not-for-profit company, and the Branch, in many ways

How does IHP financially support its work ?

- all members pay a small monthly subscription. We also make personal donations, gifts in kind and solicit others to do so. It's all relatively expensive as beekeeping goes.

- we have recently been awarded - for the first time - some modest external funding from Devon Waste Management Ltd

- we were also short-listed for a potential Royal Society grant along with three other academic institutions, but were ultimately unsuccessful

- we also have plans to get support from other sources, including a possible post-graduate student co-operative support scheme

- we sometimes get donations in kind from an interested company e.g. natural gas piping for making cylindrical hives was donated last year by Scotia Networks

- on Fridays IHP folk toil as elves in Father Christmas' Woodworking Workshop, to make the special hives etc. needed. But part of this output (nuc. boxes etc.) also gets sold to the Branch Apiary or to *Bitz4Bees*, to mutual benefit all round.

What is the NDB/IHP arrangement and is it advantageous to the Branch ? Does it cost us anything ?

There is an agreement covering the IHP shed at Horestone, for which the Branch receives a little income and other support.

Where can I find out more ?

Ask about the new Friends of the IHP (FIHP) scheme, for which Mary Houldsworth is the manager (tel 01271 321 911, or mail mhouldsworth@hotmail.co.uk)

Can I help, contribute ?

See above. The FIHP will solicit donations and subscriptions, and in return the FIHP will provide a bi-monthly newsletter and offer site visits and talks for Friends.

What is it studying ?

It studies areas like: pre-swarm acoustics and vibration signalling; comb building in near-feral colonies; use of fogging for *varroa* control; radio frequency and other tagging methods for bee tracking, and so on. We develop special hives to do this e.g. round and top bar, special folding observation arrangements etc .

Has it got anything to do with DARG ?

There is no formal connection. The IHP does studies rather than research.

Where are the sites, and how many colonies ?

The IHP has a number of sites, some shared and some with sheltered accommodation, including the one at Horestone. The new flagship one is a 32ft cabin dubbed BeeLab One ! Some of the many colonies, especially for the large cabin, are indoors to facilitate easier observation and measurement.

What other entities are they involved with ?

It is developing relationships with several universities here and abroad, and follows the work of DARG, of IUSSI and so on. A few experienced beekeepers/farmers have offered us access to their colonies for non-invasive measurements. Of course we are happy to give suitable feedback or PR material for bodies which assist us.

Can we hear a bit more on Tuesdays or ?

Yes, in small chunks ! We do sometimes bring in some of the hardware to share ideas - but because time is always short then, for more detailed exposure why not become a Friend ? There is also a fledgling web site and in due course there will be some remote webcam visibility.

Chris Tozer

'Animal Communications' Branch talk

The talk on 'Animal Communications' by Dr Peter McGregor starts at 2 p.m. at Horestone Apiary on Sunday 2nd March '08.

There will be a discussion session after and then food (shared, and hopefully Branch members will supply enough for visitors as well .. !)

Peter McGregor is an acknowledged international expert on animal communications, and is the editor of the book "*Animal Communication Networks*" (Cambridge, 2005). He was Professor and Head of the Dep. Animal Behaviour at Copenhagen Univ. for some years, and is now Reader in Applied Zoology at Cornwall College. His research work has included fish and birds etc. and he also edits the journal '*Bioacoustics*'. His work also involves more general issues related to biodiversity.

Most beekeepers are aware of the work of Lindauer, von Frisch, Seeley, Gould et al, but are less familiar with what is now known on animal signalling (communication) in a wider context, and its relation to evolutionary biology. Peter McGregor's talk will be at Horestone Apiary, Umlerleigh, just south of Barnstaple, and is co-sponsored by the Instrumented Hive Partnership and the Branch.

Webwatch

Here is an interesting bumble bee web site that you might like to check over. It has some detailed diagrams on how to build a Bumble Bee Rearing Starter box:

www.befriendingbumblebees.com/bbboxplan.pdf

Albert C

DIARY DATES

Tuesday 12 February new Branch course for beekeeping beginners/refreshers commences.

Saturday February 16th Somerset Beekeepers Association Annual Lecture at Draycott New Memorial Hall Draycott, Cheddar.

Contact Caroline Butler 01934 742075.

www.somersetbeekeepers.org.uk for full details

Saturday 23 February Holsworthy Branch Spring Convention tel 01409 254457 to book your place (see last months Northern Lights for full details).

Sunday 2nd March—Branch talk—see above

April 18—20 BBKA Spring Convention, Stoneleigh.

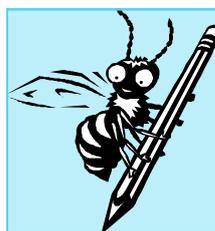
May 15/16/17 Devon County Show, Westpoint, Exeter

From Newspaper Cuttings.....

Rhododendron Madness

A thug in gardening speak is a plant, such as the rhododendron, that spreads like wildfire. Honey produced from the nectar of rhododendrons can cause mad honey disease in humans. The symptoms are dizziness, weakness, excessive perspiration, low blood pressure, nausea and vomiting. In the Persian civil war in 401BC, hundreds of soldiers who invaded a village ate the rhododendron honey they found there and fell about in fits of madness. Centuries later, the Roman army of Pompey the Great fell for the same trick, with more serious consequences: the enemy forces killed them while they were rhododendroned-up.

Honey or your Life



It brings a new meaning to the phrase 'sticking plaster' - Doctors are being urged to treat wounds by applying honey to them writes Jasper Copping.

Honey has worked where antibiotics have failed, says a new study, and it is credited with helping to drive down

rates of MRSA infection. Wounds can become sterile in 3 to 10 days

The finding of doctors in Bangor, North Wales could see a greater use of honey in the NHS.

Scientists believe its healing power is due to the enzyme glucose oxidase, which produces hydrogen peroxide, an antiseptic, while the high sugar concentration inhibits bacteria growth.

Some hospitals are already using Medihoney, a honey based dressing to treat patients. But the use of honey in medicine is not new - it was first used by the ancient Greeks and Egyptians.

JULIE'S GARDENING TIP

Many of you have been busy ordering fruit trees and shrubs to provide much needed pollen and nectar for early in the season. Here is a good tip for when they are delivered - probably sometime this month.

After planting, soak 3 or 4 sheets of newspapers per plant in water, tear the paper and fit it over the soil all around each plant. Cover the damp newspaper with woodchip or mulch. This suppresses the weeds for a couple of years - giving your trees/shrubs time to establish.

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

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