

# NORTHERN LIGHTS

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

February 2015

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



## Chair Chat

Here we are well into 2015. I hope you all had a happy and healthy start to the New Year.

The new Committee has met twice. We are considering placing a short summary of our discussion and decisions in the NL every month so that you will 'know what is going on'.

A thorough review of Horestone Apiary is being undertaken by Sylvie and Peter. The lay-out, equipment, storage, etc. are being looked at afresh. The hives are checked weekly and oxalic acid applied when appropriate hoping that this treatment reduce the varroa population in the coming season. We have lost one colony so far in spite of fondant being applied. The spring flowers are starting to show so the bees will soon have a good reason to be out and busy.

Our next winter talk will be held at 7.30 in the Castle Centre, Barnstaple on Thursday, 26<sup>th</sup> March when Glyn Davies will speak about Nosema.

I spent Christmas in Cyprus where I tasted the local honey. It was horrible. Maybe it was aphid honey. It certainly was not at all like our delicious Devon honey.

*Mave*

## Events 2015

<b>26 Feb</b>	<b>19:30</b>	<b>Talk: Bees for Trees; Castle Centre, Barnstaple</b>
<b>2 Mar onwards</b>		<b>Beginners Course starts at Horestone</b>
<b>26 Mar</b>	<b>19:30</b>	<b>Talk: Nosema; Castle Centre, Barnstaple</b>

## Bee Quotes

'Beekeeping is the most fascinating and absorbing of pastimes. One of the joys of beekeeping is the diversity of approach and this is to be celebrated. But there are two fundamental premises that govern my beekeeping. I believe that a sound knowledge of the natural history of honey bees is essential to being a good beekeeper and the first priority of the beekeeper is to keep the bees healthy.'

*John Whitaker, 'On the keeping of bees'*

## December Skittles 'Do' 2014

We had 32 members who came and joined us for the skittle night. I wish to say a big 'thank you' to all who came and helped make the evening such good fun. We all played with varying degrees of expertise; most of us with more energy and enthusiasm than know how; but it was the teenagers who won the evening. Well done to them, I think we all enjoyed ourselves.

We finished the evening with the pubs excellent food and drink; I think we all just come for the food. Our hosts did us proud and ensured we all left a few good pounds heavier than when we arrived.

They thanked us for our gift of honey, gave us seasonal good wishes and wished our bees the very best for 2015; they hoped to see us again in December.

Pencil in a reminder in your new diaries and we'll get back to you when a date is fixed. Happy New Year, good luck with your beekeeping in 2015.

*Barbara*

## Members Apiary: *Graham Kingham at Alswear*

We live on the northern most edge of our village which backs onto farm fields, these are grazed regularly by sheep and cattle and in the late spring time cut for silage. All of this activity allows the landscape to become a green wilderness as no flowers are allowed to develop for insects; the outcome of this is a restrictive honey crop. Rosebay willow herb, Blackberry, Ivy and Himalayan balsam plus the odd field of oil seed rape are the main plants to be found in the hedge row and fields about. I have a half acre garden with a good selection of bee friendly plants, although I must admit to not seeing them all being used by my house bees in any great numbers.



My apiary is set under some tall silver birch trees, with the entrances facing south, there is a 2 metre high Hawthorn hedge behind the hives. Recently we fenced round the trees with chicken wire to prevent our granddaughter and dog from wandering in amongst the wild meadow area, late this spring the worker bees ejected some of the drones and became quite aggressive, although there was lots of pollen being brought in we think that due to the very dry weather the bees were

being starved owing to the lack of nectar available, it took a good many phone calls to some learned members to establish this cause. A quick feed of light sugar solution soon resolved the problem.

We have 2 hives, 1 national with a commercial brood chamber and a homemade top bar hive which is now empty due to swarming this season, my reason for having the 2 different types is to see how bees manage and cope under different conditions, honey and wax are most welcome but of secondary interest.

*Graham*

## Horestone Mince Pie Tuesday



Although 2<sup>nd</sup> December seemed a little early to celebrate Christmas, it didn't stop us. Mince pies, quiches, hot punch and some holly and ivy decorating our club house, time to take a breather from looking after the bees. The quiz Cathy had prepared went down very well too – though I'm sorry to say I cannot remember who won it.

Mave took the opportunity, to thank Chrissie Preece for all her hard work during the year, tirelessly and always cheerfully, looking after all the beekeepers at

Horestone, as well as organizing the Shows. Sadly Chrissie has developed an allergy to bee stings and will be leaving us while she undergoes a bee venom desensitisation programme. We will miss her when we start our regular Tuesdays again.



*Sylvie*

## Committee News

Your new committee meet on the 2<sup>nd</sup> December and after a discussion on how best to take the Apiary forwards decided unanimously to continue with the reorganisation started by the previous committee.

To this end we have asked Peter Auger and Sylvie to take on the role of Apiary manager, and we ask you all to give them your full support.

We also agreed to co-opt Barbara on to the committee.

Our new Chair will be making a brief report of each committee meeting in Northern Lights in order to keep all members informed as to what's happening in the apiary

Please note that your membership subscription was due on the 1<sup>st</sup> January and any one not renewing by the date is no longer covered by BDI and BBKA insurance.

*Derek*

# Honey Ginger Snaps

50g unsalted butter  
110g SR flour  
1 heaped tsp ground ginger  
1 tsp bicarbonate of soda  
40g sugar  
1 pinch of salt  
1 tbs golden syrup  
1 tbs runny honey  
0.5 tsp lemon juice  
100g demerara sugar (for sprinkling)

Oven 190c  
Greased baking sheet.

## Method

Melt the butter slowly.  
Sift the flour, ginger, bicarbonate and salt and add the sugar.  
Rub in the butter to a crumble  
Add the syrup, honey and lemon juice.  
Lightly knead to a soft paste.  
Divide into 7gm balls and toss them in the Demerara sugar.  
Place on the baking sheet leaving room for spreading.  
Cook until golden.... 10mins approx.  
Leave for 3-4 mins on the baking sheet before transferring to a cooling rack.

Mmmmm. Anyone for a cuppa and a biscuit?

*Mave*

# Drone loss

The year 2014 was reported by many bee keepers to have been an exceptional one with large colonies developing and plenty of honey, both of these statements were true for me considering I live in a green wilderness, caused by the animals that graze around about our house in Alswear, after all it was the sheep that made nearby South Molton rich in times gone by!

I experienced a major problem in early summer due to the expulsion of most of the drones in front of the hive, they either laid there in a dormant heap or crawled about in a dazed state, with a pungent smell wafting up to greet you. What was the problem?

The weather had been glorious, no rain or at least a light shower, for the last few weeks. The bees were extremely busy and lots of them, plus honey was starting to be deposited in the supers, everything inside seemed ok. After clearing the drones up I decided to put a large seed tray with drainage holes in front of the hive entrance so I could easily see and monitor the situation and empty the drones out, helping to keep the area clean. After a week of continuous ejection I decided to look further.

Upon closer inspection under a microscope, most of the drones were young with undeveloped testes, no other signs became evident so I turned to Master bee keeper Chris Utting for some advice.

The conclusion was that the hive was hungry! How could this happen? We have had ideal conditions, virtually no June break in flowing this year, pollen was going in by the leg full, well you could be forgiven for thinking all was near perfect. The rationale was that due to the lack of water the flowers were producing a lot less nectar for the bees hence the starvation, the next stage of the starvation process would be the ejection of the pupae and sure enough there were a few to be found at the end of the week.

I fed the bees twice with a light sugar syrup which resolved the main problem, I have continued to leave the seed tray in position and take a stroll down to the bottom of the garden where the hives are situated every few days to examine the catch, stunted bees, deformed wings, worn out and dying old bees plus an odd drone, this has proved to be an exercise well worth doing and one I will continue with, it has also allowed me to collect a few bees for dissection without taking any healthy bees away. I have now placed a concrete slab under the entrance over the grass to mount the tray on.

One observation from not having many drones in the hive was that the bees seemed a lot more aggressive for a good month afterwards, several other bee keepers I have spoken to have also noticed that some of their bees have become more assertive this summer.

*Graham Kingham*

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***Member's contributions are extremely welcome: by 23rd of the month prior to publication please***