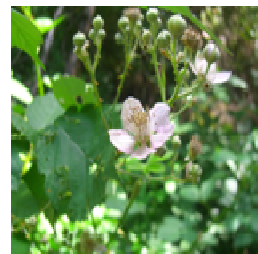


NORTHERN LIGHTS

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

JULY 2009

www.northdevonbees.org



Branch Honey Show

The height of the beekeeping year is the branch honey show. Although the show isn't scheduled until the end of October, now is the time to start thinking about your entries.

Hopefully when you read this it will be warm and sunny with a strong nectar flow. When you have harvested your bees' crop, save some for the show. There are usually classes for run and set honey, cut comb, frame for extraction, various wax and candles classes, mead and don't forget all the cookery classes for dishes containing your honey.

Preparation of show classes doesn't take too long and is immensely satisfying knowing that you are showing off your bees' products and your skills. Wax preparation doesn't have to wait until just before the show because once you are happy with the result, it will keep and only need a quick buff the night before staging. Mead can take longer so start making this year and in a year or two you might have some worth showing and don't forget you can always drink it! (I've got flagons and bottles going back nearly ten years which I blend and show if it is good enough)

There will be a session at the branch apiary giving advice about show preparation and/or a chat with other beekeepers who show regularly to find out how they prepare. This will probably be on Tuesday 8th September about 11 am - further details to be published nearer the date. We will write up notes from the discussion for those who are unable to attend.

Remember! Don't sell or give away all your crop, save the best to put in the branch show, and start making your plans now.

Jack Mummery

E-mail addresses – do we have your correct address?

PLEASE, if you have an e-mail address, and did NOT receive an e-mail from me entitled "queen cells" (sent on 18 June) do let me know your current e-mail address by e-mailing me at pchmoore@googlemail.com. If you are not receiving Northern Lights by email and would like to please e-mail me so that your name can be entered on the relevant list.

Patrick Moore

PS. If any one is receiving copies of Northern Lights in the post and by email and they wish to drop the hard copy please email Denise to let her know. Thank you.

deniseoldaker@aol.com

Apiary Manager's Report

The very welcome sunny summer has arrived and the garden looks a wonderful foraging site for our busy bees, with the beginning of the nectar flow! Our colonies are thriving, 4 having been divided and 2 apideas created. A third, this time using a Warnburgs mini-nucleus is hoped to be underway next week. Our students are experiencing an 'adopt a colony' for additional experience and confidence as their own colonies gradually arrive.

The students who are interested is sitting for the basic examination, and others who are new and keen to learn, have been meeting every 2 weeks for discussions prior to the hopefully August assessment day. A teach-in on Swarm control led by Kay, Julie and Chris proved very helpful to new beekeepers, and it is planned to offer more similar discussions throughout the summer/autumn months. Watch this Space!

We were contacted recently by a beekeeper, Edwin Holcombe from Tennessee, USA, who was holidaying over in 'our woonderful countree' and requested a visit to the apiary. Unfortunately, a change to his travel plans meant a last minute trip to Horestone, allowing no time to contact everyone. He gave a detailed account on his grafting method for queen rearing--the notes of which are available to anyone who would like a copy.

The Taster Days for the very interested public are at the planning stage, and it is suggested that 2 or 3 are held, in July and August. These days are intended to offer an insight into the fascinating yet complicated world of the honey bee and its care by we mere humans! Those still keen after a days discussion and brief hands-on experience will join the next course to be held at Horestone in February.

So with the promise of continued sunshine, may the supers be brimming and the honey-harvest a happy one! Which reminds me: the Honey Show at St Johns will be host to everyone's produce, so maybe now is a good time to begin planning entries! Good Luck!

Flowa



Featured member: ALBERT CANNON - QUALITY QUATERMASTER

Mel and I invited ourselves to Albert and Betty's idyllic house tucked away in deep Devon countryside. We had a very enjoyable morning and were taken to see Albert's bees in their brightly painted hives - 3 new swarms collected this season. Many thanks to Albert and Betty for being persuaded to let us practice our interviewing skills.

When and where did you start in Television?

I started in 1962 at ABC Television at Teddington which was originally Warner Brother Films and eventually became Thames Television in 1968. I worked at Teddington for 27 years. I also worked for a while at Boreham Wood Studios and BBC at White City.

What did you do and what shows did you work on?

I was a studio lighting consol operator. I worked on a broad spectrum of programs from children's series such as Magpie, to major drama series such as Armchair Theatre. I worked with Des Oconnor, Hughie Green, Tommy Cooper, Peggy Lee, Benny Hill and many others.

When did you decide to move to Devon?

Betty and I, plus our daughters, moved to Devon in 1979 and I continued to commute to Teddington for the next 10 years. When we first moved here we had no water, no septic tank, and no mod cons, though we did have electricity and an old phone – but it was worth it for the peace and freedom of the place. It was very different from anything we had ever done. Neither of us knew anything about farming. We started by keeping rabbits, then acquired some Jersey cows, a couple of pigs, goats and chickens. Betty and the girls had a lot of fun with the pigs but they would keep escaping. One escaped as a piglet and we didn't manage to catch it till it was full grown! We did an enormous amount of work on the house to get it habitable.

When did you take up Beekeeping and when did you become involved with the Branch?

I always had it in the back of my mind that one day I would keep bees, but didn't really start until 1990 which is when I joined the Branch. Both Betty and I joined a Beginners Class and then I took the Basic Assessment with Beryl and Duncan Weaver. I bought my first colony from Kay in 1991.

How long have you been our Quartermaster and what other roles have you filled for the Branch?

I started by tidying up the garden at Horestone but really we just got on and did anything that needed doing. Betty and I painted the chicken shed which was quite a big job. I did quite a lot of repairing things and general maintenance, and then worked with the other Branch Members in various roles including Chair, Vice Chair and Show Secretary. Of course in my various offices I did have a lot of help from the committee and other members of the branch.

It sounds as though you have had a lot of fun with your beekeeping but what sticks in your mind as one of your best beekeeping moments?

Oh there have been so many. One season I extracted 200 lbs of honey. We particularly enjoyed the camaraderie of the many Shows, especially the branch Honey Show. It was always nice to enter exhibits and win prizes. Particularly the Yeo Jenne Trophy cup for making Mead.

What about your worse beekeeping moments?

Well there was the time when we had a very, very aggressive and defensive colony at Horestone. One day in particular we had to run for our lives – Beryl ran too, we ended up diving through bushes to get away. I remember another time when I hadn't bothered to put my beesuit on, bees started to sting my ankles so I jumped in the car and drove home. It wasn't till I got home that I found the bees had come home with me, loads of them had climbed up my trouser legs and had got as far as my knees. As I jumped up and down they fell out of my trouser legs. Just as well I hadn't realized they were there or I would have driven off the road.

Thank you Albert for all your hard work in the Quartermaster Stores – and for all the work you do at home making up frames and repairing ailing equipment.
Mel and Sylvie



HOW TO MAKE A BEESWAX CANDLE. First take some beeswax..... By Emma Slade

I am really new to this beekeeping lark. I only did half the course last year and got my first nuc last October. However, I think Bitz 4 Bees must be putting something in the bee suits because even as I was bringing my first nuc home, I was working on getting a second hive! By February, the new hive had arrived, was painted with Cuprinol and my name was down on the Nucs-Needed list before it had even been printed!

Fast forward a few months to a hot sunny day at the end of May. I had been up to the garden early on to feed the other animals and as I went past the apiary, I took a quick look. My nuc bees were out and about, and there were some hanging around the second hive too. It reminded me that I needed to make the frames up for that hive as at that moment, it was standing empty – just a brood chamber, queen excluder, super, crown board and roof.

After lunch, I got organised and sat down in the hall to make the frames, back door open. It wasn't too long before I heard a really loud buzzing noise. It sounded like my bees when I open up the hive save that the volume was so much louder. I went outside and the sky was full of bees! I really didn't understand what was happening. I had only checked my bees a week earlier and there were no queen cells. In any event, the bees flying around vastly outnumbered my nuc so it couldn't be my nuc swarming.

Within minutes though, the cloud of bees descended onto my spare hive, landing and covering the front of the hive itself and on the floor in front like a veritable apron. I realised that it was a swarm of bees taking up residence in my spare hive – they were skipping out the middle man by going straight for the hive rather than starting in a tree or some other inconvenient place! The bees hanging around earlier in the morning had obviously been scout bees, checking out the accommodation. (I like to think they'd received some Estate Agents Details saying "two storey des.res. available with vacant possession; suitable amenities (eg apple tree and water) within commutable distance"!)

Over the next half hour, I watched the hive as they all started moving in doors. I am kicking myself now that I didn't take any photos as the sight really was astounding.

I left them to their own devices and stayed out of their way until the following evening when I snuck out in early evening to put in a top feeder, just in case. I felt like visiting a new neighbour with cake in hand, welcoming them to the area. I managed to leave the bees alone the following day right up until tea time when I couldn't contain the suspense any longer. I had to have a look!

I don't know how the Queen had done it but she had managed to get through the Queen Excluder and the bees were setting up house just under the crown board (see **Photo 1**). I couldn't leave them like that so in a moment of inspiration, I stripped the hive down and placed the inverted crown board at the bottom so the combs were now standing up like stalagmites. I put an empty super on top followed by the brood chamber filled with frames. I popped a spare crown board on top of that, another super and a top feeder before closing them down again. I hoped they would take the hint and move up to the brood chamber.

The following weekend was very bad weatherwise so I couldn't open them up again. I was desperate to see if my plan had worked. Monday was a better day though so I dashed home from work to open them up and check them. I won't go into details here – my lack of experience really showed and banging the brood chamber when I lifted it up didn't help either (Note to self: don't bang brood chamber – bees seem to become quite irrationally angry!). After five bee stings, I decided to close them down and bring in reinforcements.

Two weeks later, Flowa arrived on my doorstep. What a wonderful sight! I was feeling a bit out of my depth so her help and guidance was a real boon (thanks Flowa!). In fact, just watching an experienced beek with my bees has been educational. I have been handling them quite gingerly but I realise now, this may have been interpreted as nervousness – which may explain the previous bee stings.

Anyway, we got to work. First, we opened up the nuc, checked it out, found the Queen and marked her. Now on to the swarm.

On opening up, it was immediately obvious that the bees had been busy. Of the 12 frames I had put in, only the end frames on the outside showed new foundation. Five of the frames in the middle were showing sealed worker bees, two more with sealed drone brood whilst the rest had drawn comb. In addition, each frame had loads of wild comb below it, stretching out into the super I had put on top of the inverted crown board to protect the stalagmite-combs. The hive really did need sorting out!



...cont.

First thing on the order of play was to find the Queen. We were concerned that she may be on the comb in the bottom super which would not have made life easy. However, we soon found on her the wild comb on the bottom of frame 7. I thought I might be a bit biased as I thought she really was quite stunning (**Photo 2** – she is in the middle at the top, climbing on to the frame) but Flowa agreed that she was a pretty good looking Queen too. Flowa caught her, marked her then put her in a Queen case. We could now set to work.

We went through each frame, checking the contents. As I have said above, the brood chamber was pretty busy – lots of comb and sealed worker and drone brood. There were very little stores so I am going to have to feed them for a while in the future.

It wasn't easy pulling the frames out though. The wild comb at the bottom of each frame had to be pulled out and cut off the bottom of the frame. There was a fair amount of sealed drone brood there but as the colony was clearly doing well, I decided that they could be sacrificed. Later, I would check the grubs for varroa.

Once all the wild comb had been taken off the frames, it was time to clear the bottom super and put the hive back together again. Even having taken so much comb off the frames, there was still a lot left in the super itself (**Photos 3 & 4**). This was removed and the hive parts cleaned up. The almost full brood chamber was put back on, the queen excluder and the super which, in anticipation, I filled with frames. I need to get a new feeder though and will hopefully put that on in the next couple of days.

After we finished, we collected up the wild comb and brought it indoors. I was astonished at the amount of comb there was (**Photo 5**). It may not look much but the large comb on the left is the full width of a frame and 8" deep. The combs are being stored until I get time to melt it for candles or furniture polish.

So, to go back to the beginning of this article, to make beeswax candles, take some beeswax.....

Photo 4



Photo 5



NEWSPAPER CUTTINGS - taken from BBC News 2/6/09

The British countryside is being menaced by a new type of criminal - bee rustlers.

Beekeepers say the increasing shortage of bees and the rising price of honey have made hives, complete with their inhabitants, a target for thieves. They say thefts have been reported at bee farms across a wide area - from the New Forest in Hampshire to Whitby in North Yorkshire. Because specialist knowledge is required to move and keep bees, experts believe that in some cases rival keepers may even be to blame.

'Heartbreaking' The biggest theft so far happened at a strawberry farm near Telford in Shropshire, where 18 hives containing about a million bees used to pollinate the strawberry crop were stolen. Police are investigating but there is nothing to suggest local rivalries are to blame in this case. The theft came as a shock to the bees' owner Richard Lindsey.

Although there are no exact figures available, the government's NBU – set up to protect the honeybee in England and Wales – says it is “aware” of an increase in thefts. It advises keepers to brand wooden hives with their name and address and to keep bees out of sight where possible. A spokesman says: “It's always going to be difficult to keep a constant watch on an apiary, but there are practical steps beekeepers can take to reduce the opportunity for theft and increase the chance of recovering stolen equipment”.

Community of Beekeepers Bitz4Bees

The shop is open on Tuesdays, 11-o'clock until 1 pm.

You can phone or e-mail with an order but NOT later than 9.30am on Tuesdays. Small orders will be delivered at the Apiary, large orders please collect from 'The Shop'.

jeda2@talktalk.net / 01237 475705



Notes from a Tuesday morning Horestone Teach In on Swarm Prevention and Artificial Swarm.

Many thanks to Kay Thomas, Julie Elkin and Chris Tozer for giving us a very thorough overview of this topic. Apologies from the note taker – not easy to précis as we covered so much. There are many variations of technique when it comes to swarm prevention and control and the aim of the discussion was to examine different approaches and to get us thinking and asking questions. We enjoyed it immensely – some very useful information and a learning curve. If questions arise or if you would like to air your own approach please email them in and we can try to open the discussion up further via Northern Lights. Also your experiences may be of help to others – so send them in. It is coping with the bees habit of swarming that often proves to be the biggest obstacle to new beekeepers making progress.

NOTES **Swarm control** really starts the previous autumn. Bees gather their food in by September. Make sure they have enough stores and if not feed with sugar syrup. It is important to make sure they have enough stores to last them until the spring nectar flow. If they have enough they should not need feeding in the spring – if you do feed in the spring it may mislead them. They think there is a nectar flow and the queen starts to lay too early when there may not be enough bees to keep the brood warm if the nights are cold. Practice hefting the hive to become familiar with its weight and so that you know when there are enough stores. If you can only just lift when hefting there are plenty of stores. Remember to lift the floor too! Both Kay and Julie bottom super over the winter. When you take the empty super of in the spring, melt this wax down as it will be dirty from having been walked on all winter.

Swarm prevention - The urge to swarm is usually the result of a combination of things but it most often triggered by overcrowding in the hive. To prevent swarming the bees need space, space for workers, space for brood. You can keep the brood on a brood and a half. You need an able queen or they may supersede her. You cannot stop bees from wanting to swarm, its natural. You can try and fool the bees with an artificial swarm. To slow up the swarming instinct keep the bees busy. Give them lots of work to do pulling foundation. Don't put too much foundation to be pulled into the brood box at one time. Add one frame at a time. If you put too much in at one time, especially the end frames, the bees will walk all over it with propolis on their feet – they may then chew it but not pull it. So one frame to be pulled at a time and use a dummy board to fill the gap. Don't split the brood with new foundation, put foundation between the brood and their food.

Adding a super gives more space and gives the bees work to do. If you only have foundation Kay says she sometimes leaves the QE off until they have started to pull it. She doesn't put the new foundation above the QE when 2nd supering because they tend to put pollen in it. Chris sometimes uses a spray of 50% solution of honey / water – this encourages the bees up into the super with the foundation and they start to pull it out.

Hiving a swarm - in the old days it was said you could keep a swarm in a box for 3 days before hiving it—this cannot be done nowadays though. If it is an unknown swarm do not feed it for 48 hours. The 48 hours allows them to empty their crops and turn the nectar into wax so locking up any bugs and toxins. Wax is a good remover of these out of harm's way. Kay doesn't feed until the bees have been in the hive for 48 hours because the bees may abscond. Chris Tozer puts a queen excluder across the entrance to prevent this but Kay prefers to let the bees decide what they want to do! Sometimes it seems that the longer the swarm has been hanging around the more likely they are to abscond.

If you lose a prime swarm up to 1/3rd of colony goes - a large swarm can weigh several pounds and you will have lost the foraging force. After the prime swarm has gone – cast after cast may go – can have 4 or 5 casts.

To frustrate swarming you can cut out or destroy the queen cells but this probably won't prevent swarming and is not good for the natural rhythm of the colony. You may get away with it once but sooner or later you will miss a QC.

Snelgrove and Demaree both methods to frustrate the bees.

Many prefer to go with the natural rhythm of the colony and do an artificial swarm. There are several permutations of the artificial swarm. Draw backs are that you need plenty of equipment but you don't lose the foraging force and so may still get a honey crop. Another way to prevent swarming is to divide the colony up and make nucs from the queen cells – but you won't get a honey crop with this method.

Artificial Swarm - When the urge to swarm becomes strong within the colony the easiest course is for the beekeeper to do the division for them—this satisfies the bees and the beekeeper remains in charge. That is what swarm control is all about. Perform an artificial swarm if a QC is found either primed or at larva period of queen development. **YOU HAVE TO FIND THE QUEEN.** If you can't then simply divide the colony into two hives.

To perform the artificial swarm move the old hive to one side. Initially only move the old hive a little way while you look for the queen - you can have the entrance facing a differing way while you do this. The super when removed will eventually be put onto the newly made up colony.

On the old site put a spare floor and brood box with the entrance facing the same way as the previous hive was. Put in 9 or 10 frames of foundation or drawn comb.

Now check through the old colony that you have just moved and **find and catch the queen.** If your queen is marked this job is easier. Put her plus the frame that you found her on into the centre of the newly made up hive on the old site. Make sure that you have checked that there are no queen cells on the frame (**this is important as the flying bees will return to this hive over the next few days and if a queen cell is put in with the queen by mistake a swarm could still occur**). The queen excluder, supers, crown board and roof from the old hive are placed on the new hive. If there is no super put a frame feeder in and feed.

The remainder of the colony, minus the queen, is now moved at least a metre away – the entrance can be faced the same way or you can turn the entrance slightly - especially if there's not much room. Go through the colony and remove all but 1 queen cell (Kay says 1, Julie said beginners might light to hedge their bets and leave 2, Chris says that you can leave more than one as a newly hatched queen will kill the other queen cells – it is better to hear all points of view on this even if a little confusing.) If choosing one queen cell select a healthy looking, unsealed cell and record the frame it is on. This will become the new queen. Check there is enough food stored in this colony but it will probably need feeding with medium strength syrup as the foraging bees will have returned to the old queen. Push all the frames together and fill in the gap at the end with a frame of foundation or drawn comb.

One week later inspect both colonies. The moved colony may have several sealed queen cells by now. Once again various views on whether to remove all but one QC. Another method of making sure that there are no casts produced is to move the queen cell colony again, perhaps to the other side of the colony with the original queen (this would need to be done very carefully to avoid damaging the queen cell). This ensures that the flying bees which have developed during the week and learned the new position of the hive, will on finding it gone enter the nearest colony, the mother colony. This will strengthen the colony with the old queen and make sure that there are still no flying bees in with the queen cells thus preventing a cast forming.

If you haven't attempted swarm control before, then next swarm season try Pagden's basic method and use it until you understand it and feel comfortable with it. Once you understand Pagdens method you will be able to understand all the other methods

Once again, many thanks to all those involved with the discussion/workshop. We hope to arrange more during the year and to arrange some to suit those that cannot make Tuesdays.
Sylvie



DBKA COURSE - The winter Discussion Group held at the Castle Centre Barnstaple 2008/9 attracted ten members from North Devon, Holsworthy and Tavistock..

The Group studied Module 5, the Biology of the Honeybee, a module which to say the least, is quite amazing, fascinating. Of the ten, four took the Module Five written Examination and all passed.

Lea Bayly and Julie Elkin achieved Distinction, Sylvia Barber Credit, Ann Binns passed Module 5 and also achieved Credit in Module 3.

For a student to commit time and interest to winter study is always rewarding in the greater understanding of why and how the honeybee behaves the way it does, we hope that more of our members will make this effort in the future. Well done our North Devon candidates, Julie and Sylvie.
Chris Utting and Beryl Smailes

DIARY DATES

Saturday 18 July - Instow Show

Wednesday 5th August—North Devon Show

19th & 20th September - Chapelton Steam Fair (committee decision not to staff a stall because otherwise committed with Taster Days etc.).

Sunday 9 August - Brendon Show

Thursday 27 August - Quince Honey Farm visit

10 October DBKA Buckfast Bee Day

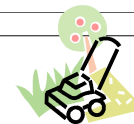
17 & 19th October - Eggesford Apple Day

24th & 25th October—Branch Honey Show

Thursday 27 August - an evening trip to **Paddy Wallace at Quince Honey Farm** has being organized - further details will follow in August NL or messenger.

Request from the Garden Team:

WANTED - a gentleman to help mow lawns at Horestone on Tuesdays.



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