

NORTHERN LIGHTS

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

JULY 2013

www.northdevonbees.org



Chair Chat

What a disappointment our Open Day/Plant Sale turned out to be.

Members had worked so hard to get the apiary so clean and tidy. The garden looked good. The tables were loaded with tea and cakes. The sun shone. The only thing missing was the people.

It was so sad to see so much time and effort wasted.

Since joining the club I have seen a sad decline in member's visits, members seem not to care if the club is functioning or not; not helping in its upkeep or with looking after its bees.

In North Devon we take our club and its facilities for granted; other clubs in Devon have to work with half as much.

I wish to say a big 'thank you' to all those who helped on the open day, the same band of usual members who turn up and help week after week; I thank you all for your efforts and apologies whole heartedly for the lack of support given by other members.

How can the club go on with so little support? How long can it go on in this state of apathy? How much longer can so few people continue to do so much?

I do not understand it and I really wish you would all take the time to tell me how you want the club to change; if by doing things differently it means you will all come, that you would use the club, then please e mail me and say how.

Barbara

Events 2013-14

Saturday 27 July	All Day	Mid-Devon Show, Nr Tiverton (in Rural Skills Marquee)
Wednesday 7 August	All Day	North Devon Show, Fishleigh Rock, Umberleigh
Sat 14 - Sun 15 Sept	All Day	Our Honey Show, St Johns Garden Centre, Barnstable
Thurs 3 October	19.00 - 21.00	Talk 'Bees and Flowers' by Leila Goss, Castle Centre, Barnstable
Thurs 16 January	19.00 - 21.00	Talk 'Bee Bits' by Chris Utting Castle Centre, Barnstable
Thurs 13 February	19.00 - 21.00	Talk 'Nosema' by Glyn Davis Castle Centre, Barnstable
Thurs 13 March	19.00 - 21.00	Talk 'Predator Mites' by Richard Ball Castle Centre, Barnstable

Dowland Fair



Well, it was probably one of the wettest days on record and one of the windiest too, but we soldiered on and put up the gazebo (this one has sides so everything inside didn't get soaking wet like last year!), and although it blew about a bit it stayed up until the end! We sold all the fudge, almost all of the honey we took, had several people interested in our Taster Day at the end of June, and got really cold and wet into the bargain! We had falcons and a Spanish horse next door to us with the Dartmoor Rescue Team on the other side so we were very much in the middle of things. Mave, Chris and Cliff came and helped us out, which was brilliant, so we went home tired but happy at 4.30 having made £152.00! The photo shows some of the team working hard and one of the team eating the profits!

Chrissie

Horestone Members Open Day and Plant Sale



Sunday 2nd June – the sun shone and Horestone had been groomed and tidy. Unfortunately as Barbara says, not as many members as we would have liked turned up. However, there were some heartening things. One of my neighbours donated a huge number of plants to our event, she is always interested in everything our Branch does. Chrissie too arrived with a car overloaded with forage. The quality and quantity of our plants this year was very high. Over the last few Tuesdays Julie and Maeve have planted what was left in the grounds, or they have found good homes with the Tuesday crowd. While planting them up we found an abandoned pheasant nest. Our bee garden really is looking its best.



Sylvie

Bee Quotes

‘Handle a book as a bee does a flower; extract its sweetness but do not damage it.’

John Muir



Car spotted at the Devon County Show . . .

Plant of the Month



Castanea sativa

Sweet Chestnut

These are big 75ft high trees with a deeply grooved bark and twisted trunks, in parkland they make beautiful ornamental specimens but in France they are grown for their nuts and at the same time a dark yellow, strong tasting honey. When my bees were nearby I heard them up above but I was never aware of the strong smell which the nectar must produce. The conspicuous green tassels are produced in July, with the top part being male from which bees gather pollen, whilst the bottom part becomes female and produces the nectar, forming this dark sought after honey. They eventually produce the nuts with their prickly outer cases, which may deter squirrels but not us humans!

Apparently Roman soldiers were given chestnut porridge prior to a battle, (in England that must have been to keep them warm and dry) now, we usually have them roasted, or Delia uses them to make a Christmas stuffing.

Shopping with my mother on a winter morning, in the town square there would be a man with a contraption on wheels, selling roasted chestnuts in paper bags, we never bought any, too expensive I suppose and I do seem to remember being fascinated by the fire and frightened by the monkey sitting on his shoulder. Wow - how times have changed.!

Kay

Member's Apiary: Julie Elkin at Bratton Fleming



My apiary is half a mile outside Bratton Fleming, 450 ft up on the side of a hill next to the old Lynton to Barnstaple railway, a lovely site but cold and windy a lot of the time, most winters the inserts stay in to keep the gales out! We have no significant agricultural crops for forage, mainly grassland, hedgerows and trees and the gardens of Bratton. The main flow comes from Bramble and Rosebay Willow herb but we have gorse for valuable early pollen and ivy for late.

I have spent the last 3 years moving the bees down and across the garden to escape the shadow of ash trees that had grown enormously, I should have thought of this when we bought the house! However at last the owner (of the section of railway embankment) has seen sense and had then cut down so the apiary

has now reached it's final destination, the bees have bought themselves slabs to stand on and some, not all that pretty, mesh screening to maintain good relations with our bee friendly neighbours SW Water. Note the Rose hive (plain one) in the photo, I am working towards more of these as the bees seem to thrive with this system. The flowery picture surrounds their main source of water in the garden, the whole garden being crammed with bee friendly organically grown plants.

It may not be the best apiary I have had for honey production but it does seem to breed hardy, healthy, happy bees.

Julie



Honey and Elderflower Marshmallows

Ingredients

100g Elderflower Cordial
510g Honey
675g granulated sugar
125g water
45g gelatin
Organic Green & Black's Dark cooking chocolate broken into pieces

Method

In a saucepan carefully heat 210g of the honey with the granulated sugar, water and elderflower cordial. Boil until it reaches 110°C. Stir it so it doesn't stick and burn to the bottom of the saucepan. I didn't have a sugar thermometer so I tested it by dropping a little into a glass of cold water to see if it made little threads. I'll treat myself to a thermometer before I make it again.

Add the gelatin to the hot sugar mixture and stir until dissolved. Whisk gently.

The next bit would be best done in a Kenwood mixer or other. Place the remaining honey (300g) in a large bowl and pour the hot mixture over. With an electric whisk, beat until cool. This takes 8 – 10 minutes. At the end the mixture will be almost at the top of the bowl and look like meringue.

Pour the mixture into a tray and leave to set in the fridge for 12 hours. The original recipe said "foil lined tray" – a disaster! It is very sticky and you will end up trimming and cutting off the foil or other lining if you do this. I'm going to try pouring it into a silicone tray next time. Maybe silicone covered parchment would work.

Once the marshmallow is set (leave it in the tray) melt the chocolate in a bain marie (mixing bowl suspended over a pan of boiling water) and once it is liquid and glossy, pour it over the top of the set marshmallow. Pop it back in the fridge again to set the chocolate hard.

Remove the marshmallow from the tin and put it chocolate side down on a chopping board

Cut into squares with a hot knife (I dipped mine in a mug of boiling water). It is VERY sticky stuff but lush and a great naughty treat. The chocolate basically gives the marshmallow a non-stick surface!

Sylvie

The Library at Horestone

We have some wonderful new books and Mel is re-doing the subject index to help you find the books you want (It will be on our website soon).

PLANTS FOR BEES by F N Howes has been updated and extended by W D J Kirk with chapters by other notable authors. While the original book is still a valuable reference guide this version is beautifully illustrated and is a wonderful book to browse.

UNDERSTANDING BEE ANATOMY is a full colour guide by Ian Stell and is an equally informative and readable book. You don't need to be taking exams to find it a fascinating insight into how the bee works.

PRACTICAL MICROSCOPY FOR BEEKEEPERS by Bob Maurer is a more specialised work designed to encourage 'ordinary' beekeepers to delve into the world of microscopy, full of good practical advice.

THE POLLEN DRAWINGS OF DOROTHY HODGES now available in a pocket sized version re printed from her now very expensive classic book.

BEEKEEPING STUDY GUIDES by J D & B D Yates. We now have the updated versions of these invaluable books:

Modules 1, 2 & 3 updated 2012; Modules 5 6 7 & 8 updated 2010; and, Beekeeping Husbandry.

Once again, you don't need to be taking exams to find these 3 books valuable and concise guides to all aspects of beekeeping.

Julie

Julie's Jottings

Thick, Thin, Heavy or Light or shall we just call it Medium?

No, I am not referring to the mental capabilities or the size or weight of beekeepers but to the confusion that continues to be perpetuated in the Bee Press about the required concentration of sugar syrup that is fed to bees.

Earlier this year I had the audacity to question the terminology used in the BBKA News to describe the correct type of syrup to feed and suggested that this was confusing especially to beginners. My comments were not welcome!

Bee books, new and old, give hugely conflicting advice and in the words of one eminent author of many valuable books "it is a b.....'s muddle out there"! In the June edition of BBKA News again there is a reference to feeding a 'light' syrup – what does that mean to a new beekeeper?

After consulting numerous books, the NBU and other beekeepers I am convinced that one of the major stresses beekeepers subject their bees to is the feeding of syrup at unsuitable concentrations.

To my elementary mathematical mind the most helpful way to express a concentration of a solid in a liquid is as a percentage (weight/volume) as most of us mastered these at school and also to give the weight of solid to be added to the quantity of the liquid. It seems logical to express the solid substance (sugar) by weight and the liquid (water) by volume and to do this in either

metric or imperial measurements NOT a mixture of the two.

We all know that bees have the ability to take in natural nectars ranging in sugar concentrations from 5 – 80%, the majority being between 20-40% and concentrate or dilute these as required for brood food or stores. We also know that a concentration of 50% sugar is the most rapidly and easily assimilated by the bees making this the best concentration to feed to starving bees, a nuc or a swarm to provide maximum energy for the least effort expended by the bees. It can also be fed rapidly in the autumn for winter stores provided it is fed early enough (after the honey crop has been taken off) to give the bees time to process and cap it. I would describe a 50% concentration as a MEDIUM syrup (not thin or light!) and make it up by mixing 1 kilogram of sugar to 1 litre of water.

For later feeding for winter stores ie into September, a THICK syrup, 61.5%, reduces the bees work load in converting this and sealing it. This is made up by mixing 2lbs of sugar in 1 pint of water.

The description 'thin' to me indicates a syrup that is less than 30% concentration and not many people use this strength of syrup now so we need to stop using this terminology when referring to syrup strength.

Let's have some clarity and use THICK for a 61.5% syrup and MEDIUM for a 50% syrup and if you really can only be bothered to use one type of syrup then use the medium 50% for all feeding purposes (Clive de Bruyn says just use Thick!!!).

Oh dear I think I can hear the lynch mob heading my way.

Julie

Edited by Jeff Orr, e-mail jeffjorr@aol.com. The views expressed are the authors' and not necessarily those of the North Devon Branch of the Devon Beekeepers' Association.

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