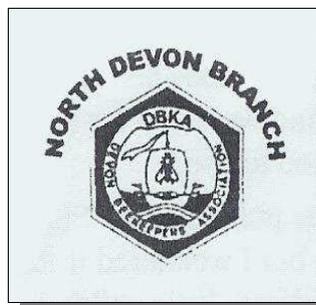


# NORTHERN LIGHTS

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



June 2007

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

## Editorial

This year's Bees & Honey Section at the Devon County Show was an outstanding success. The Bees & Honey Feature received the Devon County Agricultural Association Gold Award for the best in Class 6. A great achievement and many congratulations to all who took part - including all those Branch members who gave a lot of their time to act as Stewards throughout the 3 days.

And the opportunity to enter products in the Honey and Cookery Classes was irresistible to some Branch members! And guess what? Prizes were to follow.

Kay Thomas (who rather swept swept the board in the Open Classes!)

- 1st Prize for a pair of beeswax candles made by moulding
- 1st Prize in the Composite Class (any 4 items from a list of 12)
- 2nd Prize for a piece of English beeswax
- 2nd Prize for her Devonshire Honey Cake
- 3rd Prize for two 454g jars of light English honey
- 3rd Prize for her Honey Fudge
- 4th Prize for two 454g jars of Naturally-Granulated English honey (not stirred)

Ruth Neal

1st Prize for two 454g jars of light English honey in a DBKA Members' Only Class  
Very many congratulations to both of them - is there something in the North Devon air?

On Sunday 12th August (see Page 3), in addition to the Open Day we will be hosting a visit from the Barnstaple Horticultural Society. Best bee suits, please!

Kay's birthday has got mixed up with the year so she is having a Celebration Pig Roast at our wonderful half refurbished Apiary. ALL her past students and partners are invited plus the regular Tuesday attendees, Octogenarians and irregular Hopalong Cassidy's such as Albert. Please reply by 14th June so she may finalize the catering arrangements - Tel 01271-814758; e-mail [kathleen.thomas1@tesco.net](mailto:kathleen.thomas1@tesco.net). Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> June 2.00 pm Apiary. Bring your own tools and a chair/blanket. Park in the field and please close the gate. No presents thank you but, she would like donations for Bees for Development, or the Apiary. Pray for good weather.

This issue has more national topical notes and news, a photo montage, and a fascinating article on Instrumentally Inseminating a Virgin Queen by Beryl Smailes. My advice is to run if you see her approaching with anything that looks like a probe!!

We know of at least 3 people who are looking to buy a nuc or an unwanted swarm. So if there are any out there, please let any Committee member know.

Ed.

## 'Go Wild In The Garden!' Feedback

By all accounts the event at Rosemoor was a great success; enough to hold it again next year, perhaps. 1,000 people passed through Rosemoor's doors, 400 of them especially for the event. According to Malcolm Duncan, Director of Rosemoor, their wildlife themed events tend to draw lower visitor numbers, but he felt that 'Go Wild In The Garden!' certainly bucked that trend. Written feedback left on a flipchart at the exit included "Good bees thanks" and "Loved the bees".

Ed

## Swarm

Shall I compare thee to a  
load of hay?  
That's what you're worth, or  
so they say  
Twenty thousand bees have  
quit their garrison  
I cannot see there's any  
comparison  
I'll have my swarm back if I  
may  
Do take the load of hay away  
*Beryl Smailes*

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### **Notes from a Beekeeper - Ian Douglas**

The honeybee is an undemanding pet. I visited mine every 2 weeks last summer as they got on with their busy work of foraging for nectar and pollen, filling up a hive in a small garden just off Hampstead Heath. They were an unpromising colony from the start, riddled with wax moth and unable to grow in number particularly well. The queen died and was replaced with another, who was usurped by a third soon afterwards. My hive notes did not make for very cheerful reading. 'Very few stores,' one week and 'no queen visible' 2 weeks after that. 'Weak colony' was scrawled at the top of the page, reminding me what I had to deal with. The other hives in the apiary had additional boxes for honey storage piled on top of them but mine stayed low to the ground, unproductive and struggling. What should have been a colony of 60,000 by the end of the year was closer to 20,000 but with some careful feeding, a fairly mild winter and more than a little help from the apiary managers they made it through to the spring. I learned about a wide variety of pests and diseases and feel better prepared for the coming year than my fellow beekeepers who turned up, collected their honey and went home again. How much more of a challenge my bees are, I would tell myself, how lucky I am. There's a lot of skill in beekeeping, but there's a lot of luck too. Every beekeeper who's over-wintered bees knows the feeling of opening some of their hives and finding a colony that had seemed in perfect health to have been wiped out. Usually it's a varroa infestation you didn't spot, or a virus they've picked up from a wasp that had been trying to steal their honey, or just a lack of food in a cold snap. Mostly you'll find a lot of dead bees but once in a while, [as the saying goes], 'the hive goes Marie Celeste.' After varroa had such a devastating effect on British bees everyone's worried that a new plague will come along, but that doesn't mean that it's bound to be the case when you find an empty box that should be buzzing with life. My weak bees made it through the winter. [Other] strong, well-cared-for colonies didn't. The National Bee Unit are looking at some of those that died and they'll be able to tell us whether we have something new to worry about. Another danger to add to the long list wouldn't worry me nearly as much as the loss of the bee unit that can tell us about them. The dribble of funding has been dwindling further in the last few years and threatens to dry up. Don't worry about my bees. They'll be fine. [Other]'s will be fine too, although I can understand frustration at losing so many. Worry, instead, that beekeeping will end for the want of a few hundred thousand pounds a year.

*Daily Telegraph; 13<sup>th</sup> April 2007*

### **Research is Cut while Bee Disease Threatens**

The disastrous losses of honey bee colonies being reported from America and elsewhere are indeed worrying (report, April 13). Whether we have the first signs of what is being called Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) here in Britain is currently under close scrutiny. Reports are variable and there are always colony losses over the winter. However, it would be foolhardy in the extreme to deny the possible emergence of this syndrome here. To do so would be to put at risk not only the undeniable economic contribution bees make to agriculture and horticulture, said to be £1B/annum, but also the vital ecological role played by honey bees in our environment, which is immeasurable. So important is the honey bee that it may surprise readers to learn that Defra spends the princely sum of just over £1M on bee health and welfare through the National Bee Unit (NBU) at York and its team of hard-working and competent bee inspectors. (Yes, these inspectors from Defra are actually welcomed by beekeepers.) Over the years, while the threats to bees and beekeeping have grown, there has been an inexorable decline in the money Defra has provided for research. Of the NBU's tiny budget, a paltry £180,000 is allocated to research. So stringent have been the cuts that some hundreds of staff have been lost from research institutes in the past 6 years. Just last year Rothamsted Research Inst made redundant Britain's (and possibly the world's) leading expert on bee viruses, through lack of funds from Defra. Perversely, many experts looking at CCD believe that the parasitic varroa mite, which over the past decade or so has devastated bee colonies through the viruses it carries, may be playing a significant role in CCD. Just at the moment when we need a strong body of bee researchers, we have lost major capacity. Now is the time for the Govt to take this real and present threat to the environment seriously and direct substantial funds towards bee research. This is not fantasy CO2 off-setting, this is the real world.

*Tim Lovett, Chairman, BBKA*

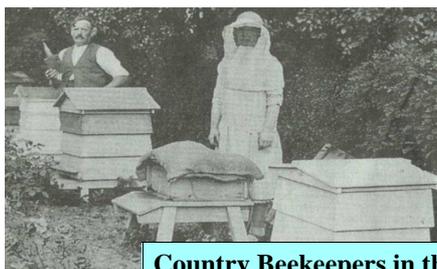
*Letter to Daily Telegraph; 16 April 2007*

### **Branch Library**

Plans are afoot to relocate the branch library to Horestone to improve members' access to the books. In the mean-time, the library is still at my house in Kentisbury. We have hundreds of interesting under-utilised tomes. Why not give me a call and arrange a visit. You'd be most welcome and the more books we have on loan the easier the move will be when the time comes.

*Elizabeth Reynolds, Tel 01271 882940*

### 3 *Northern Lights*



Country Beekeepers in the 1900s



Bees are worth an est £1B to the British Economy

#### *Dates for Your Diary*

**Instow Garden Safari**

30th June

**Family Day & BBQ**

15th July, Horestone Apiary

**Apiary Open Day & Visit**

12th August

**North Devon Show**

1st August, Huntshaw

**North Devon Branch AGM**

16th September, 1.00 pm,  
Horestone Apiary



Ruth Neal's first swarm



Spring at Horestone



Busy Bees

#### **Extraordinary Remark Overheard**

The following was overheard in the margins of the recent spring meeting and AGM of the Central Association of Beekeepers in London: "Well, I suppose that means I should perhaps think about stopping to bring queens into the country in my pocket". It was made by a beekeeping grandee from the S East of England. One despairs.

*Dave James*

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

Our web site, now run by Ruth Blake, carries the current and previous issues of *Northern Lights*, also details of our Library holdings, etc.

*Dave James*



Devon County Show



**Aye Aye**

For a new beekeeper, the very idea of instrumentally inseminating (II) a virgin queen bee might seem bizarre, even outrageous. But II is still the only sure way to control a breeding program. In 1926 the search for this control began in earnest with Dr Lloyd Watson's methods using a micro manipulator. Since then many improvements, refinements and observations have followed, notably in 1946 Dr Laidlaw's recognition that the queen's valve fold must somehow be depressed to allow free injection of sperm into the queen's vagina, and hence into the common oviduct. Thus a vaginal probe was developed. Brother Adams realized the potential of II for bee breeding in the 1970's. Today II is widely used for maintaining pure lines of honey bees, for using genetic selection favouring hygienic behaviour, disease resistance and good temperament. The system can be used at any time, regardless of weather. Equipment as standard is still evolving and refining with Schley and Swienty providing excellent quality, if expensive.

Necessary items are - robust stand for micro manipulator, dissecting microscope, queen holder tube, attachment to hold 2 hooks to open the sting chamber; forceps; a good cold light source; supply of CO2 for anaesthetising the queen; glass micro syringe with very fine screw thread; and long fine glass capillary tubes for holding storage of drone semen

**Essentials** - depression of the valve fold with tip of the micro syringe or with a specially designed tool. CO2 anaesthetic for the queen before the II, as well as during. The two allow the queen to mature and start laying more quickly, ie, in about 2 days. Total sterility of equipment. Use Milton or Lens +

**Method** - ensure a supply of mature drones and selected virgin queens. Semen is collected from about 10 drones directly into the micro syringe using a saline solution mix. The queen is removed from the nucleus, placed head first into the holding tube, then eased gently backwards and anaesthetised. The two hooks, ventral and dorsal are attached and open the queen's sting chamber. Contents of the syringe are expelled into the vagina. The syringe is withdrawn, and hooks released. The queen may have one wing clipped while still under anaesthetic, is removed and placed back in her nucleus. II requires great skill and devotion, but the success rate is continually improving and is currently around 90%. In this country, a group of about 10 practitioners - the British Instrumental Insemination Group (BIIG) - meet at Oxford and Stoneleigh to share experiences, and coach others. Don Streatfield teaches at his home in Gloucestershire, Ron Hoskins from Swindon, who recently gave a lecture to DARG, secured a grant for equipment from a conservation project. Susan Colby from University of Ohio, USA is regarded as the world expert in II, and gave lectures here last year. It is an impressive and worthy project. I was captivated years ago listening to the "gentle giant" John Pollard explaining his research into the problem of the Valve Fold. Perhaps one day North Devon will produce some scientists to carry forward this aspect of our interest

*Beryl Smailes*

**Bees 'killed by mobile phone signals' - Bonnie Malkin**

An unusually high number of honey bee deaths in Britain this year may be caused by radiation from mobile phone signals, say experts. British beekeepers have called for further research following the release of a German study showing that radiation can interfere with bees' navigation systems. In some cases, 70 per cent of bees exposed to

radiation failed to find their way back to the hive after searching for pollen and nectar, according to the research by Landau University. The researchers placed cordless phone docking units, which emit electromagnetic radiation, into bee hives. Bee experts are struggling to determine the cause of colony collapse disorder (CCD), a mystery condition in which bees suddenly abandon their hives and disappear to die. In the USA 24 states are affected and losses of 50-90% of colonies have been recorded. CCD recently spread to Poland, Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal and last week some keepers in Britain reported losses exceeding the 10% of colonies that usually die during winter. John Chapple, one of London's foremost beekeepers, said 30 of his 40 hives were empty and that other hives around London had lost up to 75% of their bees. If CCD does take hold in Britain it could have far-reaching implication for farming, as bees pollinate millions of hectares of fruit trees and crops. The pollination is worth £200M to Britain's farmers each year. The total contribution to the economy is worth up to £1B. Brian Dennis of BIBBA said: "There is so much being said about CCD in America and [radiation] hasn't been mentioned. "Until someone does a large study, it is hard to be sure."

*Daily Telegraph; 16 April 2007*

**Branch  
Exhibition at the  
Instow Garden  
Safari  
Saturday 30th  
June**

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