

NORTHERN LIGHTS

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

JUNE 2011

www.northdevonbees.org



CHAIR CHAT

Hello everyone With luck our colonies have benefited from the warm sunshine of early spring but now, with the downturn of the weather and the distinctly chilly daytime temperatures, the bees have been forced to stay in, consuming the stores they had laid down. At times like this there can be a real risk of colonies being unable to feed themselves and starving so have a look and if they're short of stores, give them a boost of light syrup at the consistency they can consume without having to dilute or concentrate - about 1 pint of water to 1 pound of sugar. I've had to give some of mine a frame feeder full of syrup as a supplement - it's better to feed them than to lose them.

Good luck this season

Chris

AST Notes for May

May has flown by and we are into June already. Apparently we can expect the main honey flow about 2—3 weeks early this year. However the very dry spring and lack of moisture may affect the nectar yield so we have been carefully monitoring our bees to make sure they are not short of stores.

Most of our colonies are doing well and building up nicely. We have two very strong, double brood colonies which we have been preparing for queen rearing using the Cloake Board method. This is new to us but we are hoping to have a learning curve to share with you later in the season.

We continue to have an open house on Tuesday afternoons. We start congregating from 1pm with the meeting at 1.30pm—before we sally forth to tend the bees. We may look a bit disorganized on occasion but I believe we have the bees to blame for this - they do not always seem to be willing to fit in with our plans. Members are encouraged to join any of the team leaders - those who are able to attend most Tuesdays tend to stick to the same team so that they can follow through with continuity.

Thanks must go to all our members who continue to support our apiary and are always there when things go wrong. We arrived early last Tuesday to get the colonies ready for queen rearing, only to find a large tree (I am prone to exaggeration, but a very large branch from a very large tree) draped across the car park. A phone call later, Cliff arrived with his chainsaw and with other willing helpers we were rescued. Then the honey shed padlock failed and Jeff stepped in to dismantle the door so that we could get in.

When we had completed caring for the bees, Jack shared his queen rearing experiences with us and show us how he uses the Jenter System.

The day ended with much washing of floors and tidying ready for the Open Day on Sunday.

We have a lot to be thankful for.

BBKA Basic Assessment

Have you been keeping bees for more than a year? If so you should consider completing the BBKA Basic Assessment. This is a practical assessment of competence of your ability to examine a colony of bees. There is a syllabus on the BBKA Website http://www.bbka.org.uk/learn/examinations_assessments/basic_assessment

I will organise an assessment day, probably in mid July, on a weekday at Horestone. If you are interested please complete the application form http://www.bbka.org.uk/files/library/appform11_1303984126.pdf and post it to me with a cheque made out to BBKA for the fee which currently is £15.00, please ensure you give your BBKA membership form in the appropriate box. I will forward the forms and cheques to the County Examinations Secretary and arrange a date.

If you would like to complete the assessment or if you are interested but would like further information, please let me know by 'e' mail as soon as possible.

Jack Mummery jackmummery@mypostoffice.co.uk

Education Officer

THE JUNE GAP

The June gap is the 1st 2 or 3 weeks in June when the fruit blossom and other trees and crops such as rape have finished flowering was always considered a risky period for bees who are building up to full strength at this time with a lot of brood to feed. Farm crops like white and crimson clovers, neither of which in north Devon, especially in areas of acid soils are significant crops, were the next main source of income before the blackberries and willow-herbs heralded the main flow in July.

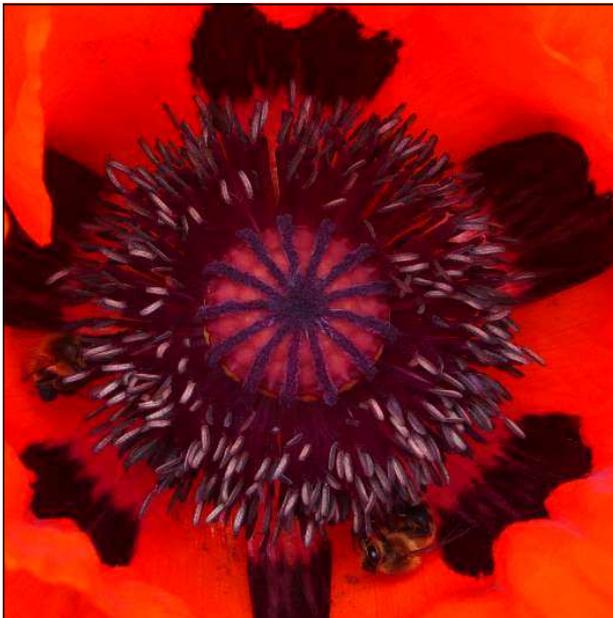
In recent years the June gap seems less significant with a 'blurring of the seasons' and more urban bees with an abundance of garden plants rarely seem affected. The weather now seems to be the main cause of a 'June Gap' with the recent cold, wet and windy weather reducing some colonies to near starvation. A reminder this year not to be too greedy and rob the bees of all their spring stores but leave the equivalent of a full super on in case the weather turns for the worse.

Lucky are the beekeepers near to some of the newer farm crops like borage and lavenders which start flowering in early June followed by Phacelia and later Sunflowers grown increasingly in field corners. Field beans grown agriculturally and broad beans in the garden help bridge the gap too. In the garden poached egg flowers (*Limnanthes*) are eagerly worked and Catmint (*Nepeta*) is worth growing as a garden hedge, both valuable sources of pollen and nectar. Other shrubs to grow include Cotoneasters, *Buddlejas globosa* and *alternifolia*, Dogwoods, *Pyracantha*, *Escallonia* and *Symphoricarpos*.

Pollen is vitally important at the this time with so much brood to rear and Poppies and Peonies are two of the most rewarding plants for bees to visit producing huge quantities of high quality pollen. Numerous bees can often be seen crowding round the anthers of these flowers. Single or semi double roses are also visited for pollen.

Heft hives regularly, and check for stores, during this period to ensure colonies continue to build up in readiness for the main flow.

Julie



Show of your favourite photos

Oriental Poppies

If you have any photo's of your bees foraging in your garden - we would love to see them. This beautiful oriental poppy is being worked for its black / purple pollen. The oriental poppy is hardy and a perennial—and as Julie says above produces huge quantities of high quality pollen.

If you have a photo you would like to share - either email them to me, or print them of and send them in to Horestone. We are hoping to put together an album at the apiary to help our beekeepers decide what to grow in their gardens.

Early summer - late May - June (*from Keeping Honey Bees Healthy Through the Year by David Aston and Sally Bucknall*)

Swarm management and control continues to be a key part of beekeeping during this period. It is also a good time to raise new queens or through using the queens reared as a result of your swarm control and colony splitting techniques. Continue to monitor the colonies that have either not swarmed or from which you have not made any artificial swarms and provide space for the bees to place and process the nectar they collect.

Branch Open Afternoon

We had a very good open afternoon/ plant sale on Sunday.

Thanks to Jeff and Neil for taking care of the plant sale and Sylvia and Julie for keeping the tea and coffee cups full. Lots of others were there and did their bit, so thanks to everyone for making it such a good social event.

Our treasurer is happy, we made over a hundred pounds for the coffers. We had new people interested in beekeeping come to look around; they were very impressed with what they saw and had a chance to chat to Kay and Jack and see the club at it's best and tidiest!!

It was a good day -- thanks to everyone who came.



Barbara

Comfrey

Every garden should have a comfrey plant even though it can be a bit invasive. It is a perennial that doesn't need a lot of TLC but is loved by bees (not so much honey bees but bumbles adore it). Its leaves can be harvested several times during the growing season, to be used as a plant food or compost accelerator.

Deep-rooted comfrey can extract large amount of nutrients from below the soil's surface inaccessible to other plants. For the organic gardener it is very valuable as a mulch, compost accelerator, as a high nutrient compost ingredient and as a liquid plant food.

How to make a comfrey feed as per Gardeners' World

Comfrey leaves, a large bucket or tub, stone to weight the leaves down, plastic bottles, watering can.

1. Harvest comfrey leaves from the base of established plants. The hairy leaves can irritate the skin, so wear gloves if necessary.
2. Remove flowers and tough stems, then chop up the leaves and pack them tightly into a water-tight container. If possible choose a container with a lid, as the solution can smell as the leaves break down. Use a brick to weigh down the leaves.
3. Check on the progress every few weeks. The leaves will break down gradually, releasing a smelly brown liquid. Top up with fresh leaves and collect any liquid, storing it in a cool dark place.
4. Dilute the collected liquid at a rate of one part comfrey to 10 parts water—the darker it is, the more you'll need to dilute it. Use the solution as a potassium rich fertiliser to encourage flowers and fruit set.

Gooseberry, Elderflower and Honey Oats

Ingredients

Serves 4

300g gooseberries, topped and tailed
2 heads of elderflowers, as fresh as possible
A knob of butter
2 Tablespoons caster sugar (or to taste)
150ml cream, whipped
100ml Greek yoghurt
50g oats
3 Tablespoons honey
Pinch ginger

Method

Preheat grill to medium, spread the oatmeal on an oven tray, drizzle over 2 tablespoons honey and pinch of ginger and mix roughly. Toast under grill, turning occasionally, until golden. Remove and leave to cool.

Put the gooseberries, elderflower, butter and sugar in a pan and cook over low heat until the gooseberries start to soften and 'pop'. Leave to cool. Then remove the elderflowers heads, mash the gooseberries with a fork and check the sweetness, adding more sugar if necessary.

Whip the cream and fold through the yoghurt, add the gooseberries, (reserve a little for the top) and mix until just combined. Chill before serving.

To assemble - layer the gooseberry mixture first in a glass or similar dish, sprinkle over some toasted oats and continue for another couple of layers. Spoon over a little stewed gooseberry on the top and a pinch of oats.

Serve.

TIP FOR JUNE

If your bees seem particularly bad tempered when you want to do an inspection (you will know because they will come and buzz you when normally they will leave you alone) - if possible let them be and find another time to work. If you have more than one colony and you have no other time to carry out an inspection - leave the bad tempered one till last.

Ambrosia Beefood syrup

From July this syrup, from Germany, will be available at a significant discount to the normal national and regional beekeeping suppliers – and with no delivery charges. The Ambrosia syrup is pre-inverted by means of a natural enzyme, is very thick and comprises a mix of fructose, glucose and sucrose. It has a low HMF content, and such a high fructose level that it will not crystallize, and the overall strength means that it definitely does not spoil if left (no mould). The 12.5 kg plastic flagons seem to be the easiest to handle, and these will be available from July at around £17, a discount of over 30%, for collection from *Bitz4Bees*. If you'd like to pre-order, without deposit please contact Derek on 01769 561033



DIARY DATES

August 13th -

Nosema Testing Day

at the Castle Centre, Barnstaple. Further information nearer the date.

BRANCH HONEY SHOW

**Our North Devon Branch Honey Show is on
22nd and 23rd October, 2011**

At St John's Garden Centre, Barnstaple.

Further information nearer the date.

National Honey Show - Weybridge

27th October - 29th October.

International classes and beekeepers lecture convention

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