

NORTHERN LIGHTS

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

June 2014

www.northdevonbees.org



Chair Chat

This is a rather hurriedly prepared Chair Chat this month as the bees and beekeeping things have kept me very busy. It is proving to be a very swarmy year – I put a bait hive out last week as despite regular inspections, a swarm was nestled deep into a hawthorn bush. It worked and I carried the bait hive back up to the woods and the apiary site. After checking this week I found a marked and clipped queen happily laying – but how did she manage to fly 200 metres with a clipped wing? Another colony that I did an artificial swarm on has continued with supercedure queen cells in with the old queen. So it is yet another steep learning curve year.

High Varroa counts have been reported by the National Bee Unit. So make sure you monitor the mite drop and read up on the range of options available – more information is available in the leaflet 'Managing Varroa' from the NBU website.

Hopefully some of you will have already extracted some honey. We have several Shows coming up and if you have some you would like sold let us know.

And finally, be aware of the 'June Gap'. Early flowers are coming to an end and there may be a couple of weeks before bramble, clover etc start flowering. You need to check the amount of stores as you go through the colonies and feed if they are getting low. If you feed make sure it isn't stored in super combs you plan to extract honey from later. I keep a couple of super frames of honey in the freezer and will defrost and put them back on the colony if they get short of stores for any reason.

Sylvie

Events 2014

7&8 Jun	All day	Bees Honey and Plants Weekend, St Johns Garden Centre, Barnstaple
15 Jun	All day	Dowland Fair
26 Jul	All day	Mid Devon Show, Tiverton
6 Aug	All day	North Devon Show, Umberleigh
13&14 Sep	All Day	Branch Honey Show, St Johns Garden Centre, Barnstaple
16 Nov	14:00-16:00	Branch AGM, Castle Centre, Barnstaple

Bee Quotes

'Go to the bee, then poet, consider her ways and be wise'

Bernard Shaw 'Man and Superman'

Notes from Horestone



There is a lot to be said for beekeepers not planning holidays and outings in May. Our bees have gone slightly crazy and despite all our hard work, planning and artificial applications the apiary has had a few swarms. We managed to catch a few, but as we only get there one day each week, we have lost more than we collected. Our Queen rearing is doing its best to produce the perfect queen who will lay workers that do just as we ask – but were not quite there yet. So for another year May has got the best of us and I for one am very pleased that it is now June.

Having been the apiary coordinator for two years, I am passing the job over to new hands at the AGM in November. If anyone one would like the challenge of being 'site manager' then talk to me or Sylvia. When I started beekeeping I never thought that I would be doing and learning such a variety of new skills - slab laying, wood work, fixing drains toilets and gutters; thank goodness for expanding foam and a tube of 'Sticks Like S**t'. All good fun and never a dull moment at Horestone, but let's hope we have a little peace, quiet and sunshine for June and July

Barbara

Topical Tips for June

- Usually queens stop laying eggs before swarming; when checking the brood frames as soon as you see new eggs this indicates that the colony is not going to swarm and there is no need to look any further
- At the end of May I have seen White Clover already in bloom; this suggests that this summer there will not be a June gap in the available forage
- Add another super well before the frames in the existing supers are sealed
- The middle frames in a super are sealed first as it is warmer in the centre; you can aid the colony by moving the unsealed frames of honey to the centre
- Keep the grass around the colony cut short so that if the queen falls to the ground it can be easily found and recovered
- As the average day temperature approaches 20° and with a strong colony consider a Shook Swarm procedure; this will provide a disease, Varroa and swarm control

Chris Utting

A Rollercoaster Ride for First Year Beekeepers: *David and Anthea Easton*



1 Swarm

It all started with a newspaper advert for a weekend introductory beekeeping course in June 2011. On arrival I (David) discovered that all the other course members had been given the wrong date so I had the undivided attention of the apiarist for the two days. He had bees everywhere, in his house, in his car and also in the several hundred hives he had scattered at various sites just outside the M25. I learned a lot, including how to be calm in adversity when one of his lost bees entered my right ear canal and insisted in staying there for about five minutes without stinging. He also told me that 50 of his hives were stolen one night, so there are baddies in the beekeeping world. Maybe his close proximity to the M25 made him an easy target. His most useful advice was that we should join our local beekeepers association. We joined the North Devon branch and attended the Tuesday afternoon sessions at Horestone.

After completing the 'Beginners Course' in the spring of 2012 Chris Utting arranged for us to buy a hive of bees from David Welch. The bees were collected on 16th April 2012, they were calm and easy to handle, ideal for beginners. Four weeks later we discovered 8 capped queen cells so we carried out an 'artificial swarm' on the 12th May. Most of the displaced bees did as they were expected and climbed up the sheet into their new hive (see photo 1, note the textbook on the ground to the right of the hive!). Several clusters of bees refused to move from the sides and underneath of the hive even as night approached. Anthea covered them with a blanket and the following morning they seemed lethargic, perhaps because of cold, but still refused to enter the hive. That evening, having lost patience with them, she brushed them off and within a short space of time all entered the hive. The bees seemed to settle well for the next two weeks, consuming large amounts of syrup.

On the evening of 25th May, a rare warm sunny day, we heard a roaring sound and noticed thousands of bees hovering above the new hive. Realising that they were swarming we decided to let them settle so went and had supper. When we returned they had all disappeared. We scoured the locality in ever increasing circles and eventually found that they had entered a hole in the wall adjacent to a neighbour's front door. With the neighbour's agreement, we tried to smoke them out even drilling holes in the wall to gain better access for the smoker. Some bees emerged and formed a cluster under the eaves which we collected and returned to their hive. Two days later the main bulk of the swarm was continuing to cause havoc at the front door so there was little alternative but to kill them by spraying with pyrethrins through the holes we had already drilled; this was an effective but unhappy experience.



2 The Apiary

Matters settled and the bee hives were a source of interest to visitors and especially our grandchildren who were keen to help (photo 2). In the first week in June we collected our first frame of honey for extraction (photo 3). We used a small plastic centrifuge that was designed for taking water off freshly washed salad leaves. The honey was easily extracted by placing pieces of broken



3 First Honey

comb in the device but the comb was wasted, a worthy sacrifice to obtain our first honey.

June and July 2012 were cold and miserable so syrup feeding had to be continued. Our original queen who had produced placid daughters had disappeared in the swarm and both hives had become populated with a much more aggressive generation. Being more experienced and confident we managed to cope with their temperament. By early September we were unable to see eggs or larvae or a queen in our new hive so, in preparation for Winter on September 6th, we decided to unite the two hives using the 'newspaper method'. Two days later hundreds of dead bees were found beneath the hive entrance (photo 4). On full examination of all the combs on September 12th, the next warm day, we found two queens in the top brood box and one in the bottom



4 Dead bees

brood box. We also found in a piece of brace comb a discharged queen cell (photo 5). We assume the bees had a war following breach of the newspaper due to the presence of several queens. By early October there was only one queen present, producing a nice even brood pattern. Being novices, we left two full supers of honey on the hive over winter having removed the queen excluder. We disturbed the hive as little as possible except to apply Oxalic Acid on January 26th as Verroa treatment.



5 QC

Throughout the winter the bees were seen on sunny days doing cleaning flights. February and March were cold and damp and by March 27th no bees had been seen for nearly two weeks. Were they all dead? Removing the hive roof and peering through the opening in the Crown board revealed plenty of active bees.

On April 15th 2013, our 365th day as beekeepers, it was mild enough to carry out a full inspection of the hive. The lower brood box was almost empty apart from some peripheral old pollen stores. The upper brood box contained some honey and pollen but no brood but a significant amount of mould (photo 6). The lower of the two top honey supers

was full of healthy looking brood. Presumably beekeepers who place their overwintering honey supers at the bottom of the hive do this to encourage the queen to lay in the brood frames rather than the honey frames.



6 Brood Frame

So, our bees survived their first year with us in spite of inclement weather and a series of beekeeping errors. We are pleased to report that a further year on our bees continue to do well and have expanded to three hives.

We wish to thank all the team at Horestone for their continuing advice, support and kindness.

David

OBITUARY: JOHN DALE

John Dale was a prominent member of Northern Branch in the eighties and nineties: on the Branch committee and Chairman for a year. His wife, Esther, was a wonderful cook and she has her name in our prestigious trophy for this on no fewer than six occasions. Soon after this, John left the branch and concentrated on raising money for charity through whist drives. He went all over North Devon taking with him produce from the Great Field; cauliflowers for 25p, cabbages and leeks at similar prices. Around Christmas hampers would appear! As well as running the whist he would collect pensioners from their homes, acting as a taxi service.

They came to Devon from Essex with John taking the Farm Managers post for the Christy estate. They lived in Braunton where Esther ran a successful B&B. Very soon after John introduced himself to the police and thereafter became their No 1 Swarm Collector. Sadly, John died after an accident collecting a swarm.

I feel sure that you would all like to extend your condolences to his wife and their family.

Kay Thomas

Escape to the Country comes to Horestone



On Monday morning our Chairman, Sylvie Barber, received an urgent call from the BBC asking if they could visit our apiary to do some filming for part of the programme 'Escape to the Country'. Naturally, she agreed and an email whizzed round asking if anyone could be at the apiary on Friday at 8.45am. A small group arrived at 8.30 and we set up a table with all the usual things: honey, fudge, candles, etc., hoping to sell some to the crew. We had no idea how many people to expect and wondered if they would have trouble getting their big van down the narrow lanes; much to our surprise they turned up in cars! There were just five people - the middle-aged couple being filmed who wanted to lead a bit of the 'Good Life' in North Devon (not as easy as we are led to believe), the Cameraman (a lady!) in charge, the Sound Recordist and the Gaffer (lighting).

We sat round the table with coffee whilst they explained what they wanted and I was chosen to be the guide and we worked out a plan of action. The couple were filmed walking in from the gate with me greeting them and saying "Hello". We did this four or five times with me eventually appearing like magic from behind a bush! We followed this up with a few minutes of general conversation about bees and why they wanted to keep them – all filmed on the grassy slope in front of the shed.



You all know that if you ask 10 beekeepers a question, you'll get 10 different answers - the couple had four specific questions to ask so, as before, we filmed it four or five times and each time I gave a different answer! Everyone was then dressed up and off we went to look at a colony. Gentle bees, excellent brood pattern, marked Queen, no propolis and all on newly drawn white comb - oh, that they were all like this! We found the red marked Queen second frame in - at this point I insisted they had to stop at 2 'takes'. Each of the couple held a frame and although I said to keep it vertical, the wife kept laying it flat - fortunately, the wax didn't fall out of it.



All the volunteers not directly involved in filming were very busy, using their time to scrape boxes, melt wax and steam frames, etc.

Finally, back in front of the shed again, we tasted some honey. This took an age to film because of noise and distractions - first there were people moving about in the shed going to and fro past the window, then the train went by, then an aircraft passed overhead. 2nd 'take' - another aircraft goes over. 3rd 'take' I'm in the middle of explaining that although the label on the jar says 'Heather Honey' it isn't pure - we have to stop again as the train is coming back from Barnstaple!



Lunch was being prepared inside and the steamer was now switched off. It takes a while for the Sound Recordist to discover that the steamer was making a noise during the initial interview and now that it's off the sound is different. The steamer is duly switched back on and we have to wait for it to start boiling again. Another plane passes overhead and I begin to wonder when we can manage to film another 'take' before the train comes back again...

Once the tasting is complete, we retired to the shed for a well-earned lunch break provided, as usual, by the catering team. The visitors were quite taken aback by our generosity and we all enjoyed learning about each other's lives.

Kay Thomas

Honey and Plant Weekend at St Johns

Next weekend, 7th and 8th of June, our branch will be at St Johns Garden Centre, Barnstaple promoting a Honey and Plants weekend. We will be providing information on plants to attract bees and promoting all things beekeeping. We would love/need some extra help so please ring Julie, Barbara or Sylvie if you could spare some time. We will also be talking and selling honey.

If you have any honey that you would like sold at the event (correctly labelled) or candles, please let us know and bring it with you to either the apiary on Tuesday or to the event (Friday afternoon/Saturday morning) – we ask for 10% of the price of the jar of honey sold as a donation to the Branch.

The weekend should be great fun – so please come along and bring your family too.

Sylvie

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

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