

NORTHERN LIGHTS

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

March 2008

www.northdevonbees.org



Editorial: Spring is coming - the snowdrops and crocus are already in bloom. A little later in the month, and as soon as the weather is warm enough for the bees to be flying, it will be time to gently open the hives and check more thoroughly the condition of our bees. Do ask for help or advice if you need it; between us all we have a wealth of experience. *Mel & Sylvie*

Chairman's Chat

Where possible I try to be cheerful and positive but sometimes that can be difficult. A quick look at my bees revealed that all is not well with all of the hives. Fondant put on before Christmas as belt and braces food-wise seemed to be going (as and when temperature permitted), but over the last week or so a number of hives that appeared to be OK now have dwindled to no more than a few bees. At the Apiary the picture seems to be the same; one hive in particular when examined had no more than ½ cup of bees, no eggs, no brood but a queen still attended by the few bees that were there. The frame where the queen was had plenty of honey on the other side from the queen and the bees appeared to be accessing it with ease. Why then has a colony with stores in easy reach of the bees petered out and will obviously not survive into spring?

I mention in January that it is important to collect and correlate information with regard to the performance or lack of performance of colonies as they emerge from winter and go into spring. Please, if you can, help by telling us about your experience with your bees, for we may be able to see a pattern to the losses that we have.

The sort of information that might be useful is:

- varroa numbers last autumn and through the winter.
- age of queen. If she was a new queen last year, did she have a good laying pattern from day one? This is important to know in terms of the colonies that have sailed through the winter into spring.
- did the hives that didn't survive have food that you would normally have expected to see it through to the spring?

Last year was by any measurement an odd year for bees. Some suspect that the dwindling of some hives may be due to the fact that new queens last summer failed to be inseminated properly by the drones.

Information gathered may be a way of confirming that proposition, or may highlight some other problem.

Please do not just accept that you have lost one or more colonies. Think about possible causes and make a note of everything, then pass it on to me. Email address is jica@btinternet.com

Jim Slade

DIARY DATES

2 March Sunday Animal Communication talk, 2pm start at Horestone

8 March Saturday DBKA Presidents Day & AGM, The Isca Centre, Exeter Arena, Summer Lane, Whipton, Exeter (see February *Beekeeping* for programme and directions)

Every 3rd Sunday afternoon of each month, from April till September, at **Horestone**, there will be the opportunity to meet together for discussions/demonstrations/ and sharing of all things beekeeping. More details to follow in April's *N Lights* - try to keep Sunday 20th April free (2pm)- we look forward to seeing you.

18—20 April BBKA Spring Convention, Stoneleigh.

Taking a Sample of Bees

Colonies should be sampled during the first inspection in the Spring and in the Autumn when the honey crop has been removed and before the winter feeding is started. The sample is intended to look for adult bee diseases. Therefore it is the older workers that need to be included in the sample, so the best sample point is the entrance to the hive and not from the combs. 30 bees is the most practical number to give a good survey spread. The easiest time to take a sample is at the end of a general inspection of the colony. At the start of the inspection block the entrance with foam. Many foraging bees will soon build up at the entrance. Take a standard match box and open it 3/4. (avoid glass or plastic containers as the bees quickly turn to soup). Holding the matchbox at an angle of about 30 degrees apply it to the front of the brood box and sweep it smoothly and quickly across the mass of workers. Quickly lie the box flat against the hive front so that the bees are trapped. Gently slide the box shut. Push a drawing pin through the base so that the drawer cannot slide open. Fix a label identifying you, the hive and the date. Put the match boxes in a plastic bag as soon as possible and place the bag in a freezer overnight. Next morning remove the sample from the plastic bag and post it off to one of the Branch Microscopists, with a stamped addressed envelope. The charge for this is £5 a hive, cheques to be made out to 'NDB, DBKA' please.

Please check that the Microscopists are not away before you send!

DO NOT TAKE YOUR SAMPLE TO HORESTONE

Send the bees to either:

Tony Wright, 11 Chambercombe Park Road, Ilfracombe
EX34 9QN 01271 865516 or

Jim Slade, Pleasant View, Bridge Reeve, Chulmleigh,
EX18 7BB 01769 580918

ABANDONED HIVES - Questions and Answers on Hive Identification and Removal. This leaflet has been prepared by the BBKA in response to a number of questions about hive ownership and how to deal with apparently abandoned hives. Whilst the BBKA has taken due care in compiling this advice, each case is different and more complete legal advice should be taken in the event of a serious dispute. This advice has been prepared under English Law; questions of property and landholding may vary in other countries of the UK. Also, some of this advice has never been tested in any court, so legal precedent is not well-established.

Q1. What should I do to make sure my hives are not removed by mistake? - Firstly, make sure that the landowner knows how to contact you and make it clear that this information should be passed if required to anyone with a reasonable right to know.

Secondly, make sure that all equipment is indelibly marked. Your BBKA membership number is ideal for this purpose; it will never be used by another beekeeper. Alternatively, providing a note of how to contact you under the roof of each hive is a 'standard' technique. Make sure this is well protected—a note in a permanent ink in a small, sealed glass 'breakfast' honey jar is ideal.

If you cannot visit the hives or there is possibility that they may look 'abandoned' (for instance, because of prolonged illness), make sure that the landowner, neighbours, local police and local Regional Bee Inspector are made aware of the circumstances. It might be an idea to enlist the help of another beekeeper to keep the hives looking 'cared for'.

If members of the public may pass reasonably close to the hives (for instance, on a footpath) a sign giving your name and phone number may be reassuring. If you choose to keep your hives as concealed as possible, say to limit vandalism, remember that if they are seen, they are more likely to be regarded as abandoned.

Q2. I have taken ownership of some land (or I have taken a lease/tenancy on it) and have found some beehives which I know nothing about. What should I do? - Bees are important pollinators. If the hives appear to be 'occupied', then the bees may well be doing something useful for the surrounding crops and flora.

However, bees are prone to a number of serious diseases and an unmanaged hive represents a threat to all bees in the area.

Firstly, try to find the owner of the hives. Are there any names or numbers visible on the hives? A number like 12-34-56 could well be a BBK A membership number and they may be able to help. Contact your local beekeeping association; again, the BBKA can put you in touch with it. Even if the hives belong to someone who is not a member, an experienced beekeeper will be able to examine the hives both for other information about the owner (e.g. by looking inside the hive) and to assess their state of health.

Secondly, leave a note for the beekeeper in an obvious place near the hives (or inside the hive). This should be protected from the elements and bees (who will chew paper to destruction). A responsible beekeeper will visit his hives at least weekly in the active season from April to September. In deepest winter (October to March) a beekeeper may not visit as there is no need to do so for beekeeping reasons, so please be patient if you can.

If you have taken ownership/tenancy 'with vacant possession' then the previous owner may be in breach of their obligations if the hives remain. Finally, as a subtle point, bees are regarded in law as wild, not domesticated, animals. Therefore, you 'own' the bees as soon as you own the land they are on, but you cannot own the hive equipment on the same basis.

Q3. I cannot easily find the owner of the hives. What else should I do? - Firstly, you must ensure that you have made reasonable efforts to find the owner, including:

- asked all local sources of information (and the BBKA) as above
- kept a record of all attempts to contact the owner
- ideally, have dated photographic evidence if the site appears overgrown or the bees appear to be a nuisance.
- notified the police of your attempts to find the owner.

If all reasonable attempts fail, then you can assume ownership of the hives. Where you have left a note with the hives, then a period of 28 days is regarded as a reasonable time to wait.

Secondly, you could give notice to the previous land owner to remove the hives by way of notice under Section 12 of the Goods (Interference with Goods) Act 1997. This is the most likely way to proceed if you wish to follow a formal route as it may cause the previous owner to contact the hive owner. You should allow a reasonable period of time for removal; again, 28 days is likely to be sufficient in law.

Thirdly, a possible route would be to report the hives to the local police as 'lost property'. This has never been tested in law, as far as the BBK A is aware. The police are likely to waive the need to bring the 'property' to the police station but may like to have some photographs of the hives and location. After a period of time, then the property reverts to the 'finder'.

Q4 I have found the owner but he/she refuses to remove the hives. What can I do? In principle, provided you have a reliable record of this refusal (or reliable witnesses to, for instance, a conversation) then you can immediately deal with the hives when and how you wish. If you feel the need for more legal protection for your actions, you can serve notice on the owner as in Q3 above. After the 'reasonable period' you may deal with the hives as you wish, if they remain.

Q5. I am a beekeeper who has been approached to deal with some hives that appear to be abandoned. What should I do? - Before you do anything to the hives, make sure that you have the right to do so. If you are being directed by the landowner/tenant then proceed as follows.

- Make sure that they put all their requests in writing or that you have a reliable witness.
- Be aware that the colonies may well be diseased. Be meticulous in your hygiene and quarantine arrangements. Remember you could be accused of bringing disease **into** the hive as well.
- Limit your first actions to the minimum necessary to try and establish ownership of the hives using any possible information stored inside. Ensure that the landowner has exhausted other means of establishing this. Take photographs before and after to protect yourself from any accusation of damaging the hives, should the owner re-appear.

- If asked to destroy the colonies, make quite sure that the landowner has tried to find the owner. Inspect all his documentation to that effect before proceeding. Destruction should (on a worst case basis) follow the procedures for AFB destruction specified by the NBU and NOT use insecticides.
- If you are asked to move the hives, apart from the question of ownership, you may be acting in contravention of a standstill order. Check with the RBI that there is no such order in force.

Q6 I am a landowner and I want to destroy beehives on my property as a last resort. What should I do?

Firstly, try to get help from the local beekeeping association or a local beekeeper, as for Q5 above.

Secondly, try contacting the BBKA for further advice.

Thirdly, the DEFRA Regional Bee Inspector may be able to help. However, they can only destroy hives if the presence of certain diseases has been confirmed. In any case, you should contact the RBI to make sure that there is no standstill notice in force relating to the hives. You could be inadvertently committing an offence if you move such hives.

If no help is forthcoming, then the absolute last resort is that you destroy the colonies yourself or with the help of a licensed pest controller. There is a recognised specialised procedure for honeybee colony destruction used by DEFRA when required. Information can be obtained via the National Bee Unit or the RBI in writing or from their website.

Please do not attempt to destroy the colonies in any other way. Insecticides may be picked up by other bees and carried to properly managed colonies. Many 'poisonings' of beehives occur for this reason. Please bear in mind that hive components, equipment, wax and debris can all contain disease for many years. Regardless of if they contain live bees or not. Do not keep 'souvenirs'.

The BBKA recognises that colony destruction is a measure of absolute last resort, but that this is preferable to allowing potentially infected bees and equipment to remain in the open environment.

Q7. What can the 'Ministry' do? - DEFRA maintains a number of Regional Bee Inspectors (and Seasonal assistants), under the direction of its 'National Bee Unit'. They have statutory powers of inspection of hives if a notifiable bee disease is suspected in the hive(s) or has been found in other hives in the area. They also have powers to order treatment or destruction of hives if certain diseases are confirmed.

The NBU and its staff have no powers to intervene in questions of ownership of colonies and equipment. The NBU prefers to deal with beekeepers in a co-operative fashion. Where disease inspection is required and the beekeeper cannot be contacted, it is usual for the RBI to place a note in the hive or in the apiary and allow 2 weeks for the beekeeper to respond before taking more serious action.

Similarly, if treatment or destruction is required, notice must be served on the colony owner. The RBIs will follow the same general approach described in Q2 and Q3 above before taking matters into their own hands as they have no specific legal powers to assume ownership of a hive.

Q8 The owner has reappeared—what are his rights? - If the hives are still intact and you are satisfied that this is the owner, then the sensible thing is to ask him to remove the hive(s) forthwith. If you have previously made all the reasonable attempts to contact the owner (as described in Q3 above), then you can keep the hives if you wish. If the hives have been destroyed under the same conditions, the previous owner has no redress.

In anticipation of this eventuality, it is vital that you have and keep a full record of all your attempts to contact the previous owner.

NOTICE BOARD



The **Bitz4Bees** shop at Fishleigh will be open each Tuesday from the 4th of March between 12 noon and 1pm. For further information and for placing orders tel: 01237 475 705. *Dave & Jean*

Winners of the 100s Club for February.....

First: Roy Pink and Second: Chris Utting

Orchards Live We now have website reciprocal links with Orchards Live. We hope to have an article next month on hives in orchards; until then look them up on:

www.orchardslive.org.uk/orcharding.htm.

Trophy Winners for Branch Honey Show 2007

These are now engraved and ready for collection at Horestone on a Tuesday or at Branch Talk on 2nd March.

Bees and your Money Take or borrow a £10 note, look at the obverse side (Queen's Head). Look at the hologram on the silver foil patch with a reflecting light source. At one angle you will see the figure 10, tilt it a little and you will see a bee skep and 3 flying bees. The Governor of the Bank of England is a beekeeper and there are even hives on the roof of the Bank! *Chris Utting*

THE LIBRARY AT HORESTONE.

The Library has arrived, thanks to the wonderful work by our talented craftsmen, and is now open for business. A new updated list will be available shortly on the website with modifications as new books and DVDs are added. Work is continuing on various documents and reports that will be accessible in a reference section in the library. The proposed loan period is one month, although I do realise that not everyone can be at the Apiary on Tuesdays and other arrangements may need to be made with the librarian. There are a number of books outstanding/missing so please scan your shelves for that forgotten book and return it, perhaps when you come to the talk on 2nd March. Julie Elkin 01598 710986 elkin@mypostoffice.co.uk

Arab proverb

When you shoot an arrow of truth, dip its point in honey.

*******SUBSCRIPTIONS*******

are now very over due. You know it makes sense, you are in danger of NOT being covered for insurance, really important.

IT, IS facilities for members

This is just a brief reminder for newer members - and less observant older ones (!) - of the IT and IS facilities provided for our members. This includes:

- library, now housed at Horestone Apiary. The Librarian is Julie Elkin; see Feb. '08 issue of *N Lights* and item on previous page here. There is a good selection of books for loan (see listing on our web site) and to this will be added more CDs and DVDs now. Suggestions, requests for new titles, and offers for help, are of course encouraged.
- our web site is at www.northdevonbees.org. You can download archived copies of the monthly *Northern Lights* here, and there is much useful Branch and general information besides. It is always a struggle to keep this fully up to date, so doubtless our webmeister, Ruth Blake, would also appreciate some help from time to time.
- the main meeting room at Horestone has a PC, printer and now two decent sized monitors. It is broadband enabled, through an arrangement with the IHP group and a wireless hop across the valley. This facility is suitable for informal one-to-one or small group discussion of internet usage for your bee studies or for help with basic PC use etc.. If you struggle with document preparation or web usage, feel free to ask for help. Members or visitors can also access the internet throughout the Apiary, either wirelessly or via any mains socket (sic !); ask me for details.
- this main Apiary meeting room also now has a good quality digital projector for more formal presentations. This is available to members for loan, but only on a very strictly controlled basis and on payment of a fee and a non-trivial but refundable deposit.
- members receive the BBKA and DBKA newsletter and magazine in paper form; DBKA's magazine is entitled simply *Beekeeping*. Members also have access to the BBKA's web facilities (see membership card for password).
- our Branch has a very good monthly newsletter, *Northern Lights*, ably edited by Sylvie Barber and Mel Browne. **As from this month the default distribution of this will change from paper to e-mail. If any member wishes to have a paper copy as well, just let our membership and distribution secretary Denise Oldaker, or myself, know.** Further, a few members still suffer dial-up rather than broadband internet provision, so if that applies to you please let us know and you will get a paper copy. (You've been listening and reading about this planned change for months, haven't you?). If we do not hold a valid e-mail address for you, you will of course continue to receive *NL* in paper form.
- our Secretary, non-astronomer Patrick Moore, also sends members snippets by e-mail on an *ad hoc* basis. Additionally the *Messenger* is sent out by e-mail only on an irregular basis and is especially suited for events reminders and such like between the *N Lights* issues. All these e-mail distributions are sent out 'blind', please note. Feedback is encouraged.
- all Branch members receive the DBKA Yearbook, edited by our own Chris Utting. This is very useful, and note that your e-mail addresses and telephone numbers will be shown unless you have expressed an unwillingness for this (there is a tick box on the subscription application/GAD form for this, otherwise let Denise or I know promptly.)
- there is a Yahoo! group site called *horestoneapiary*. Just find this on Yahoo! *via* your favourite browser; membership is, of course, free. This is specifically set up for all Branch members (and others with an interest), whether or not folk use our Apiary, so please make use of it. For example, if you come across a great beekeeping site or document or have some interesting pictures, questions, comments, experiences etc, post them here to all our benefit. It's informal and easy to use. Ask Tony Wright or myself if you have any difficulty.
- there is a related Y! group site called *tawbeekeepers* that you may also find of benefit. Both sites are moderated, to discourage spam and suppress any personal disputes ! *Dave J* (01769 561002 or dave@greenover.net)

MORE TROPHY HISTORY - THE BERNARD PRICHARD CUP

Bernard Prichard was the founder of our apiary. He worked for the "Min of Ag and Fish" as it was known in those days as a part time Foul Brood Officer, alongside his day job in local government in the Thames Valley. I believe he either started or brought to life the Twickenham and Thames Valley Apiary, which is now the leading apiary in the country, known for its teaching and research. When he retired to North Devon at St Giles-in-the Wood he started all over again, setting up an apiary in a quarry at the top of Pottery Lane, Instow. When I joined the small group in 1976 we had a 10ft x 8ft shed and 4 hives, and one could look over the Bar out to sea where the wind blew in straight from America, the coldest place in North Devon.

He ran the Beginners Classes at the Beaford Art Centre and like all such classes attracted and set on the right road many dedicated beekeepers, myself and Cyril Gould (county treasurer for 10 years) amongst them. Cyril did the accounts for Major Chichester - brother of Round the World Sir Francis, I believe - and through his Game Keeper found a derelict cottage with a large dilapidated garden which he would allow us to use as an apiary. We moved there in 1979, took the shed and bees and were all set to go. Unfortunately very soon after this move Bernard began to slip into dementia and he only managed to attend this new site for three years. How he would have loved to see what it has turned into.

Bernard was a likable character; he referred to the bees as "his little girls" even when they stung him on the nose. He drove a Rover 80 car which resembled one owned by a Travelling Salesman in Bee Equipment. He once set fire to it with the smoker in the boot! He travelled miles looking at people's bees and sorting out their problems. His extracting room cum garage held a 20 frame extractor and on the shelves were large cheeses of wax. How the honey and engine oil mixed is another story, as is the continuation of Horestone Apiary.

Kay Thomas

PETER THE GARDENER. (Peter Woollard)

Peter, how did you first become interested in gardening? - The gardening interest really began when I worked as a farm labourer. During the winter of 1949-50, when no local jobs were available, a local nurseryman offered me a place working in his nursery as a stop-gap. This kindled an enthusiasm, which, although I'd always been the gardener for my parents when growing up, I had not considered it as a full-time profession. At the end of that winter, I returned to sheep farming, and it was 27 years before my nursery dream came to fruition!

Did it take you as long to become a bee-keeper?

Even longer! When we moved from the farm, with the enchanting name of Swineham (!), to our delightfully named Cuckoo Mill, there was a small corner of the garden just crying out for a few bee hives. However, my wife disliked 'anything that buzzed', and declined to have 10,000 bees buzzing around the garden, so it was only 5 years ago that my first hive came into residence! I hadn't the heart to enlighten my wife as to the actual number of bees per colony! The relatives of the bees from the original 5 hives, now reduced to 2, enjoy their waterside valley situation.

Plants have obviously played an important part in your working life.

Absolutely. I found running a nursery fascinating, and although all my knowledge came through reading and hands-on working, we travelled as far as Cardiff to sell our plants at weekly markets/fairs. The busiest was South Molten, where no admission fee was charged to the public, so many folk just browsing would leave with a pot or two!

Have you noticed bees attracted to any one specific shrub or tree that you could recommend to we new gardeners?

There is a hawthorn, grown by a Tiverton nurseryman who lived next door to a beekeeper. I had a call from him one day, when he said the bees were so numerous on this particular tree, that he thought there was a swarm! The shrub which I would always plant is a *Stewartia Malacodendron*, with rose-type white flowers, with purple staining, flowering mid-summer. My personal favourite is a Magnolia, and for the bees, the *berberis ottawensis purpurea superba*. If you stand underneath this shrub in full bloom, you can hear the contented hum of busy bees! [Our gardening team have planted cuttings of this shrub in a hedgerow.]

The apiary garden now has a team of 5 girls. When did you begin gardening at Horestone?

It was about 5-6 years ago, after Judith (Westcott) had completed her basic course and offered me an invite. Albert had planted mint and comfrey, which grew amongst the grass around the southern beech. No garden as such existed, so I began by opening up an area designated as a shrubbery, filled with bee-friendly plants. I really miss working alongside Albert in the garden and in the quarter-masters stores.

Peter, you must have seen many changes over your lifetime, and I wonder what you would like to change or return to from the past?

My first 10 years as a farmer from 1952-62 were spent having no electricity, and we worked by tilly lamps! Only 3 farmers in the district had generators. Now the evening sky is lit-up like Piccadilly Circus. No electricity may also have prevented 'up

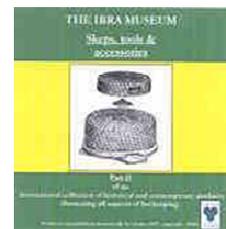
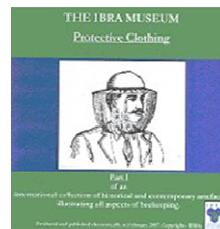
-country folk' coming to live down here. *Well Peter, I'm from up-t' north, although when I read my electricity bill, I am right with you!!*



The 'new gardeners' wish Peter a healthy and happy retirement and offer our very grateful thanks for his initiative and hard work. We would like to honour his legacy as Horestone's recent gardener, by planting the *Stewartia* he recommends. All the bee-keepers miss you, Peter, and look forward to meeting again when Judith visits us in the summer.

Mary H ('Flowa')

New titles for your library



**[The IBRA Museum: Protective Clothing](#)
[The IBRA Museum: Skeps, Tools and Accessories](#)**

These recent publications are not in fact books, but CDs. Both are from IBRA, and can be purchased on-line from their shop at around £9 each. There is a discount for more than one CD, and if you are an IBRA member.

There is a third such IBRA Museum CD as well, rather more general in coverage. These two here cover protective clothing and skeps, tools and beekeeping accessories. The format is as a Powerpoint file (there is a reader included if you do not have PP) including notes, some 70 or so frames each in number. They are essentially a pictorial trip around the IBRA/Eva Crane library historical artefacts archives.

Both are quite good. The protective clothing CD, for example covers the earliest examples from around 430 AD right up to the present - including a disposable Canadian design. The skeps one is really interesting and contains many charming pictures and snippets of information. Various methods of honey extraction and venting are included - and one that I liked a lot was called a sneck (a mice excluder for skeps). There are round-bottomed rectangular skeps, skeps with a variety of movable frame arrangements, and so on.... Well worth study, or for a fine gift. *Dave J*

ROOM TO LAY

So your colony was well fed last year and has survived the winter, but has the queen got enough room? Have a look at the brood frames as they may still be stuffed with last year's stored syrup. Re-arrange the frames so that the queen has plenty of empty cells in which to lay her eggs. Its called frame management. *Chris Utting*

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