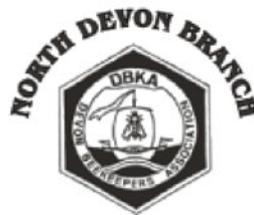


# NORTHERN LIGHTS

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

March 2014

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



## Chair Chat

The end of February, and still the record breaking rainfall – but compared to others, we have been lucky. The bees like us, are inside huddled under cover. But despite all the rain the snowdrops are in flower and Horestone looks a picture. A wet picture yes, but it makes us think that spring may eventually arrive. I do wonder what the humidity levels inside the colonies are. At the moment it isn't cold, the queens will/may be laying, so keep hefting and top up with fondant if needed. We are all looking forward to some warm sunshine and seeing our bees foraging again.

**Because Horestone is so wet we will have to delay our apiary start date.** Although initially we hoped to have a work day on the 25<sup>th</sup> February, we will have to postpone this until the 11<sup>th</sup> March. This will probably be a work day to prepare for the new season. We will send out more details for the 11<sup>th</sup> March by email.

We were all very sorry to hear that Glyn Davis has been in hospital, we wish him a speedy recovery. Chris Utting stepped in as speaker for our winter talk and we enjoyed hearing about his experiences in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Committee will soon be firming up the dates for our spring/summer events and activities. Our new Beginners Course starts on 10<sup>th</sup> March – good luck to you all. Our Nosema Clinic will be on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> April at The Castle Centre, Barnstaple.

Other events to help promote beekeeping are pencilled in and Chrissie and her team will be on the lookout for willing volunteers to help them run smoothly!

Good luck with the forth coming season.

*Sylvie*

## Snowdrops at Horestone



## Events 2014

10 Mar		<b>Beginners Course starts; Castle Centre, Barnstaple</b>
11 Mar		<b>Horestone opens</b>
13 Mar	19:30-21:00	<b>Talk 'Predator Mites ' by Richard Ball; Castle Centre, Barnstaple</b>
26 Apr	10:00 - 15:00	<b>Nosema Clinic, Castle Centre, Barnstaple</b>
6 Aug	All day	<b>North Devon Show</b>
13/14 Sep	All Day	<b>Branch Honey Show; St Johns Garden Centre, Barnstaple</b>

## Next Winter Talk 13 March

Richard Ball recently retired as the NBU National Bee Inspector and is the Chairman of DARG. He is currently in demand all over the UK as a very popular speaker.

We are very lucky that he has agreed to come to North Devon when he will be speaking on his recent researches in the effectiveness of introducing predator mites, which are actually tiny scorpions, as a natural control of Varroa.

Their use has been long established as a control of mites in poultry.

Contributors needed please!

I need volunteer writers for the Member's Apiary slot otherwise this months will be the last!

Jeff - [jeffjorr@aol.com](mailto:jeffjorr@aol.com)

## Member's Apiary: *Jeff Orr at Hartland*



After attending the excellent Horestone Beginners Course, I eagerly picked up my first nuc (from a reputable supplier) in early June 2008. I named the queen Priscilla and proudly hived her. Within six weeks I caught my first swarm as Priscilla did not stay long in her new quarters. After much help and advice from Flowa Houldsworth (who was Horestone Apiary manager at the time) and later, a visit from our bee inspector, Peter Auger, I ended up with two colonies to go through that winter (both did). The next year the original Priscilla swarmed as soon as she could and her daughter (Priscilla II) got EFB. The only good thing about the EFB was the shook swarm treatment dissuaded Priscilla II from swarming that season so I got my first honey (about 3 jars). I requeened the queenless original Priscilla colony with a queen from Glyn Davis. She turned out to be the opposite of the Priscilla dynasty –

her colony never swarmed, eventually calmly superseded and produced several seasons of plentiful honey even though the weather was not good. Priscilla was a lesson I never forgot - if you have a swarmy queen then replace her asap - don't persevere.

My present apiary is in Hartland at the top of the north slope of the Abbey River valley. It's a little shady mainly due to surrounding hedge row trees but my preferred site, on the sunny field by the river, has a public footpath running through it. When I chose the site I forgot how heavy and awkward it would be to move colonies or full supers, but it keeps you fit.

When I (temporarily?) moved to York last year I eventually decided to leave my colonies where they were and try a minimum intervention method of bee keeping (some may call this 'natural' beekeeping). The pictures show the nine rather crowded colonies I left behind. During the spring and early summer I only visited a couple of times and two colonies, which very weak, did not make through the terrible spring despite feeding fondant. Needless to say all seven remaining colonies swarmed in my absence and only five requeened themselves successfully. However, my neighbour was delighted as two swarms took up residence in her empty hives after her colonies failed to get through the last winter. Minimum intervention did not work for me and, of course, with late summer varroa treatment and feeding for the winter I had to go back several times in late August and September.



I now have five colonies going through the winter; we'll see what the spring brings . . .

*Jeff*

## Topical Tips for March

- Old winter bees are dying off fast and brood can be developing fast; so be prepared to feed a starving colony; mid-March to mid-April are the high risk months; the risk diminishes when you see the first dandelions in flower as they are good pollen and nectar providers;
- Observe the entrance on a flying day; dead larvae being cast out is a strong indicator of starvation or chilled brood; your knowledge of the recent cold temperature will be helpful;
- Foraging workers returning with pollen loads suggests that there is a laying queen and larvae to feed;
- If the hive is very light and the colony is still alive emergency feeding can be applied; if in doubt – feed;
- An emergency feed of warm 50% sugar syrup (1kg sugar/1 litre water) can be gently drizzled onto the live bees between the bee space of the top bars; the bees will lick each other clean;
- An alternative emergency feed method is to take a brood frame of drawn comb; lay it flat and carefully drizzle warm syrup on to the open cells; return the frame to the edge of the cluster; do the same for the other side of the cluster;
- Do not be too eager to carry out a Spring inspection as there will be a danger of chilling the brood if the air tempera-

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ture is below 16°C; last Winter the Spring was so late that I did no inspections until May; of my 20 colonies I only lost one; this Spring appears to be very similar – if not worse;

- If the colony is dwindling and not building up compared to other colonies, this is a sign of either queen failure or Nosema disease.

*Chris Utting*

## Education Matters

Another year, another raft of opportunities to improve your beekeeping skills. This year the Beginners' Course will be starting on March 10th and we already have 13 keen wannabe beekeepers signed up with a few more showing interest as the start date approaches. There will be two Taster Days this year - 29th June and 7th September at the very generous cost of £10.00 per person. If you know of anyone who would like to join us for these sessions, please do tell them to get in touch with me.

The Module 1 (Honeybee Management) sessions are underway for a small group hoping to improve their beekeeping skills, led by tutor Chris Utting and the Microscopy Group continue to meet once a month. If you're a new member and would like to join any of these groups, let us know and we can forward the details.

There will also be another opportunity in the summer for taking the Basic Assessment - any beekeepers with at least a year's beekeeping under their belt who would like to consolidate their knowledge (nice certificate to show for your efforts) can put themselves forward. The Assessment is very gentle - a chat, a look at the bees and a cup of tea usually suffices. It's enough to let the assessor know how much you know about beekeeping and that you can handle a colony effectively and safely.

If there are any modules or aspects of beekeeping you'd like to pursue further, let us know so that we can organise a group or talk on the subject.

Happy Beekeeping

*Cathy*

## North Devon Branch Talk – Beekeeping in Trinidad & Tobago



Chris Utting has been on many overseas trips to see how other countries keep bees. Some of them have been organised through the DBKA, Kent Beetour and most recently Bees for Development Safaris.

Chris enjoyed his first trip to Trinidad and Tobago so much that he took his wife there to celebrate their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. The beekeeping safari was organised by Gladstone Solomon, born on Trinidad, he was an excellent guide and the group received VIP treatment. The first part of the tour was to Trinidad where they were taken to a commercial beekeeper with Africanised (killer) bees and a killer bee queen rearing apiary. There were several slides showing smokers the size of watering cans and cameras being attacked by the bees! However, Chris survived his experience and was only too happy to share with us the rapid attack response of these bees, swarming capacity and speed of travel. Apparently while visiting a swarm was spotted hanging in a tree – the visitors moved on fairly rapidly!

After Trinidad the safari continued on to Tobago. Chris told us about the Stingless (Mellipona) Bees - these bees are housed in small boxes about the size of nucs. There are two types of cells, brood cells and honey pots. Although the amount of honey that can be removed via a syringe is only small – it is sold for very high prices. We were shown slides of top bar hives which are used widely in Tobago. But the safari was not just about bees – there were slides of a walk in Tobago rainforest, lobster salads, rum tasting, glass bottomed boats, a bitumen lake, a tree dripping with Scarlet Ibises, pig tails and snouts in the market, and the National Steel Band Championships. Beekeeping at Horestone seems a little tame in comparison!

A very enjoyable evening – thanks Chris

*Sylvie*

## Cathy's Plant - Herb Robert



There is a plant in my garden which I have always loved. Its small pink flowers with their orange pollen peek from fernlike leaves and attract bees and hoverflies from March until November. The long red stems arch gracefully over banks and pots and there is even a prostrate form underfoot between the cracks of the paving and in the walls. I didn't buy the plant from any garden centre or nursery; it just pops up where it chooses and has followed me around from house to house for years. We all have it in our gardens and some are more tolerant of it than others. Presumably because of its familiarity to our households, it has more common English names than any other plant; you might know it as "Kiss Me Quick" "Canstick" or "Robin's Eye" or even the more sinister "Death Come Quickly" but I have always known it as the delightful Herb Robert, *Geranium robertianum*.

Herb Robert is a native annual, growing in shadier places such as the foot of hedges and beside walls. The flowers vary in their pinkness and there is even a white form, devoid of any pinkness or red in the stems. now cultivated and sold as a garden speciality. It is one of those plants that has long been associated with cultivated or disturbed land and settlement and probably derives its name from association with Robin Goodfellow – the household fairy or spiritual being who haunts all dwellings. It was thought that to look after Herb Robert and its avian counterpart, Robin Redbreast, who also "haunts" our dwellings, was to bring good luck and the protection of red-capped Robin Goodfellow himself. It follows, that as a plant representative of the fairy folk,

any damage to the plant itself would bring bad luck as in its northern name "Death Come Quickly".

This knowledge, however, doesn't seem to have stopped its regular use as a known herbal remedy for such varied disorders as sore throat, gingivitis, toothache, colitis and staunching the blood flow of wounds eg from nosebleeds. The herb has a good reputation as an energy giver, immunity builder, and as a powerful therapeutic and preventative helped no doubt by the fact it contains vitamins A and C together with the disputed effects of the trace element germanium. There is also evidence building that shows it has possible uses to help regulate blood sugars. In the past it was carried to attract good luck, and due to its seedpods' remarkable resemblance to a stork's bill (as with all the Cranesbill family), to enhance fertility.

The leaves and stems can be drunk as an infusion, rubbed on the affected spot or chewed – and don't let its other name of "Stinky Bob" put you off because when the leaves are crushed, there's a strong smell of fox (or mouse depending on your interpretation). This unpleasantness can be alleviated by the addition of honey and holding one's nose. The leaves can also be rubbed on the skin as an insect repellent (but the smell may also repel other people) and will also, apparently, produce a brown dye.

Apart from Herb Robert's association with household spirits and protection, its usefulness as a folk remedy and its attraction for bees, it is also a mighty pretty plant to have around, especially *en masse*. Many years ago, while commuting home from London, the train I was on was diverted to a siding; just another boring delay before reaching home. It was late summer and late evening. The sun was sinking and had that special light which glows along the ground at a low angle. The train sat beside sets of rails which hadn't been used in decades, their rusty parallel lines running off to the horizon. Spread like a carpet over the shingle as far as I could see was a mass of Herb Robert, its red stems echoing the glowing rusty rails and the pink flowers nodding above in the fading light. Urban beauty, like Herb Robert itself, can be severely under-rated.

*Cathy Backway*

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

## Bee Quotes

'Full merrily the humble bee doth sing, till he hath lost his honey and his sting'

*William Shakespeare*