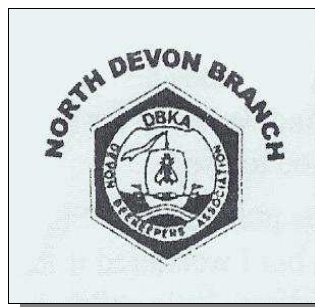


# NORTHERN LIGHTS

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



May 2007

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

## Editorial

My apologies for the late production of the newsletter this month. There are many reasons for this, but no real excuse!! I promise to do better in the future.

I inadvertently published the wrong photo last month of John Hoyles' Mahogany Beekeeper's Valet. The correct version is included this month on Page 2; remember that the tray at the front normally carries the nails, not John's loose change!

Now the weather has improved I hope your bees are active and all is well with your various apiaries - or with your "Bee Yards" as Thomas Seeley, from Cornell University, calls them. He used that "cute" phrase in his lecture on 'The Beehive as a Honey Factory' at the BBKA Spring Lecture Convention and Exhibition at Stoneleigh. The lectures and activities on the Saturday of the Convention were very good but, oh dear, the organisation and signing of activities left a lot to be desired. And the refreshments and catering were the worst that we have seen in many a year! A lot will have to improve before we make that trip again.

There has been a lot of interest in the press recently about honey bees and I have included some bits and pieces from, primarily, the Daily Telegraph this month. Some of it continues the debate over the so-called "Colony Collapse Disorder".

Kevin Tricker has finally moved his bees - with some help - and his report on the move makes interesting reading. Helping him out was Ruth Blake who describes a unique solution to the problem of moving heavy hives.

You will see below that Chris Utting and Beryl Smailes will not be teaching basic classes any more. I would like, on your behalf, to thank them both for the splendid and thorough teaching that they have given to many people over the years. Thank you both very much.

*Ed.*

## North Devon Branch Students' Basic Assessment 2007

Revision Day with Chris and Beryl will take place at Horestone Apiary on Sunday 1st July 10.30 - 4.30. Assessment Day will be Saturday 7th July. All enquiries to Chris Utting, please.

## Basic Classes to Close

Chris and Beryl have been running evening classes at North Devon College for the last four years for the BBKA Basic Assessment syllabus. They have decided not to continue with the classes due to other commitments. 54 students have taken the courses resulting in about half passing the Basic Assessment.



## 'Go Wild in the Garden'

The Rosemoor show went extremely well on the 28th April. The weather was beautiful, and the crowds rolled in to see the various stalls and displays. Our new show scene for the year is shown above and it worked out very well. We had a steady stream of visitors throughout the day, with some 10 genuine enquiries about beekeeping. Much interest was shown in Brian Marchant's microscopy display and Jim Slade's new observation hive attracted a lot of attention. The Branch coffers were improved by around £130 through sales of honey and fudge. The new ½lb jars of honey out-sold the lb jars by 2 to one! This was a very good start to the show season and all looks good for the other shows.

*Ruth Neal*

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## 2 Northern Lights

### John Hoyles' Beekeeper's Valet



### Have Bees - Will Travel

Two months after our move to Somerset, the need to do something about my bees (which I had left behind in the interim) had become pressing. Peter & Judy, the couple who had bought our house, had been very accommodating in letting me leave three of my hives

in place but as the colonies began to build up for the spring, I needed to give them some attention and I couldn't really do that from 70 miles away. With the help of my new beekeeping neighbour, Bill Lawson, I had found the colonies a temporary home just up the road from our rented house. A settled period of dry weather in early April was forecast and I decided to go ahead with the move. Ruth (Blake) had kindly offered to come over and lend a hand with the loading and Bill would do the same at the other end. All was ready. I had some concerns as this was my first attempt at moving full sized hives. Five hives would not fit in my car so I had to press my trusty trailer into service. This trailer has one problem - it has very firm suspension, so any light load tends to bounce around all over the place - not much fun for the bees and a possible recipe for disaster if parts of the hives became dislodged. My solution - four 25kg bags of coal were loaded on board and the tyre pressures were let down to 8psi. Since I was some 70 miles away, I decided to complete the whole process in 2 days - coming down on one afternoon to prepare the hives, stay with friends overnight, then move the hives the next day. Tuesday afternoon saw me calling on the first two hives at my out-apiary at about 4pm. I had not expected to be able to seal up the hives that early, but, to my surprise the rather cold & windy conditions had driven the bees indoors and few, if any, were flying. Lifting the roofs, I carefully blocked the holes in the centre of the cover boards with pieces of plywood and then quickly pushed in foam blocks to seal the entrances. I had also prepared pieces of plywood - approx 18 by 4 ins - which I screwed across in front of the foam as a "belt and braces" approach. These also served to partly secure the floor to the brood box. I then screwed scrap plywood strip to the sides of the hive to secure it all together, added gaffer tape around the cover board, and they were all ready to go. My "home" colonies proved a little more difficult to subdue as they were flying freely - amazing the difference between the 2 sites. Finally, about 7:30pm, they were tucked up for the night, and I was able to repeat sealing up the hives. I had brought three travel screens with me, but was unsure

hives had ventilated floors, so suffocation wasn't a problem. In the end I put them on over the cover boards leaving the holes in the top of the boards open. Roofs then went on again over the travel screens for the night. Wednesday morning was fine and clear and Ruth and I finished off securing the hives. More strips of ply scraps were screwed to the sides of the floors, brood boxes and supers to make sure everything stayed together and, as an additional precaution, ratchet tie-downs were put around each hive. Now the hard work started. Everything had to be carried from the bottom of the field up to the trailer by the house - about a 1 in 4 slope!! Ruth's patent hive carrier (see separate article) was pressed into service, and after a lot of huffing and puffing, 3 hives, assorted stands, roofs & other miscellaneous gear were finally on the trailer. The day was warming up considerably by the time we finished (about midday) and I was beginning to have doubts on the wisdom of sealing up the tops of the hives. After a lunchtime halt for bacon butties supplied by Ruth, I finally set down the A30 towards Chard, stopping about halfway to dribble some water in through the small vent holes in the tops of the hives - just in case. The journey was uneventful if rather slow, to avoid too much jolting of the bees, and I finally arrived at the bees' new home at around 5pm. A quick call to Bill brought him up to help and, as I was able to drive right up to the new location, offloading of the hives was relatively quick and easy. We debated whether to leave the hives to settle down for the night, but I felt that some of them had been shut up for over 24 hours, so deserved to be released. I removed the plywood strips from the entrances - and then, from the third hive, a steady trickle of bees appeared around the end of the foam. We quickly pulled out the foam blocks and out poured the bees - quite a sight! One week later, after being left alone, they have settled in well and are bringing in plenty of nectar. A big thank you to Ruth and Bill for their invaluable assistance - I could not have done it alone. Now when I move them to their final home, I'll know what to expect. But the bees might prove me wrong!

*Kevin Tricker*



### It'll come in useful one day...

Ever kept some old junk because it'll come in useful one day? Well, just once in a while it actually does! I rashly volunteered to help Kevin Tricker when the time came to move his bees to his new home, but I didn't fancy carrying them all the way up that hill. We needed wheels, well, maybe just one wheel would do ... Enter the rusty wheel-barrow. I removed the bucket, which was more rust and holes than metal, and bolted an old crown board to it. This was easier said than done as rusty as it was, there was still a lot of metal to drill through! In use, we soon discovered that it needed an extra piece of wood on the front to stop the hive sliding forward. The Mark 2 version will probably have an old hive roof fixed upside down instead of the crown board, though it would have to be a fairly loose fitting one to allow room for whatever ties and fixings you use. The previous owners of our current house left behind the base of a wardrobe, which was a large drawer and its housing. The housing has been doing time as a set of nest boxes for our chickens and I've turned the drawer and various other bits of scrap into a solar wax extractor. Now, what else is in that barn...?

*Ruth Blake*



### Rape Makes Bad Honey

Sir - I am surprised by the letter (May 7) extolling the values of rape honey. I kept a few hives in my garden in Buckinghamshire between 1960 and 1990 and regarded the advent of oilseed rape in those decades as an unmitigated disaster for my harvest. Bees visited the rape fields in preference to any other source and the resultant nectar would crystallise in the comb, making it impossible to extract. Its flavour was also most unpleasant. My wife purchased a jar of locally produced honey the other day and this exhibits the bad flavour and solid consistency I remember of old.

*Charles Rainer, letter to Daily Telegraph; 9<sup>th</sup> May 2007*

### Winter Losses Survey

In recent years the DBKA has organised and reported the Springtime results of a simple survey of winter colony losses experienced throughout Devon. Each year a carefully randomised set of members is approached to compile a reasonable estimate of the total losses over the winter. A nominal 25% sample of members having at least one colony in the preceding Autumn is used. Obviously this is not the same as total colony numbers, but there are near 650 members in DBKA, so the results are argued to be tolerably useful for assessing trends over the years. Brian Gant who is the collator, plans to include the county data in a forthcoming issue of *Beekeeping*. But in the meantime you may be interested that our reported losses run at a little under 15%. This figure is far less than some of the wilder claims or statements reported recently in the media. DEFRA was minded last week to make a statement on this issue, especially when some luminaries were reported to have argued that the huge new level of losses looked as if it reveals the CCD syndrome now in the UK - and some even linked it with wilder claims relating to cellular mobile RF exposure as a result of misinterpreting a few preliminary experiments reported from Germany. I will post some related information on that on the Yahoo! *horestoneapiary* and *tawbeekeepers* sites.

*Dave James*

### Community of Beekeepers Ltd: an update

The Company (trading as *Bitz4Bees*) recently held its first AGM. The turnover was some £20,000, and although the net profit is relatively low, a dividend was declared for both share classes. This was not expected or planned for some further year or two yet. A couple of the reasons for the success is the very low level of overheads, and the enormous commitment of Dave & Jean Morris. There are no remunerations paid - to anyone. The present directors were re-elected; the current chair of the Branch is automatically a non-executive director. The general thrust of the venture will remain as it is, with care taken not to over-reach our resources and mandate. The shipping container stores at Umberleigh is proving very suitable, and we have very good relationships with suppliers - the latest being the elves of Father Christmas' Woodworking Workshop. The continued use of an interest free loan from an anonymous third party continues to help the Company build up cash reserves. Importantly, our MD, Dave, is to get some of the petrol expenses incurred in support of the business! The Company is paying the Branch a non-trivial level of expenses in payment for use of the Horestone facilities for meetings, inc catering, for temporary storage, assembly and display space, etc.

*Dave James*

**Keepers fear mystery bee illness**

Government inspectors are investigating reports of unusually high numbers of honey bee deaths. Some keepers, especially around London, say they have lost far more than the 10% of colonies that usually die off during winter. John Chapple, Chairman of the London Beekeepers Association, lost all the bees in 30 out of the 40 hives he keeps in Acton, West London. Mr Chapple said that a nearby club in Harrow had lost half of its hives and that the Pinner & Ruislip Beekeepers Association had lost 75%. Because bees pollinate fruit trees and other crops, the consequences for British farmers of a collapse in honey bee numbers could be devastating. The total contribution of bees to the British economy has been estimated as £1 billion. Max Watkins of Vita, a company that makes products for honey bee health, said: "The situation is very serious but no one yet understands the cause of these widespread honey bee colony deaths. The phenomenon is alarming especially because agricultural pollination and therefore crop production levels are threatened." Beekeepers in 25 US states have lost 50-90% of their colonies to a mystery condition being called Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) - in which bees suddenly abandon their hives and disappear to die. There have been unexplained, severe colony losses with bees failing to return from their searches for pollen and nectar in Poland, Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal in recent years. Early warm temperatures in Britain have seen honey bees emerging earlier than usual from their winter clusters. Some keepers fear the mysterious CCD could have reached Britain. Several beekeeping associations outside London contacted yesterday said this year's losses in their regions were no higher than average, however. While the cause of CCD is unknown, suspects include pesticides, malnutrition, antibiotics, mites and increased solar radiation due to ozone thinning. Some believe the recent deaths could be caused by the varroa mite becoming resistant to drugs used against it. Imports of bees from the US are banned. So far Government bee inspectors say there are no signs of CCD in Britain and have played down reports of higher-than-average winter deaths. A Government spokesman said: "We are aware of the serious situation in the USA. Cases of colony loss in England and Wales reported to the National Bee Unit are being investigated. However, it is not unusual for some colonies to be found dead or absent at the end of winter."

*Taken from an article by Nic Fleming, Science Correspondent, Daily Telegraph; 13 April 2007*

**Microscopist**

As most of you know, Brian Marchant wishes to lighten his load of branch microscopist. We are looking to find one or more branch members who might be willing to help with this work. Brian is more than willing to assist in training a replacement/s. We are acquiring additional equipment so that more than one person can have his/her own microscopes to work with but there is enough equipment at present to make a start with training. It is also intended that there will be a microscope area in the Horestone building that could be used for training and on going work. If you think that you would like to become involved in this side of beekeeping, please contact any member of the committee or Tony Wright, Patrick Moore or Jim Slade. This work is very important not only for the branch apiary but for any member who might wish to have bee samples examined. If you are not sure what might or might not be required of you please give it a

*Our Branch membership, now over 100 in total, enjoys around 75% who have active e-mail accounts*

**Dates for Your Diary****Devon County Show**

17th to 19th May, Westpoint Arena, Exeter

**Instow Garden Safari**

30th June

**North Devon Show**

1st August

**North Devon Branch AGM**

16th September, 1.00 pm, Horestone Apiary

**Jim Woollacott's****Surprising Apiary Tip**

Suppose you visit an out-apiary and realise you've unfortunately left your bee suit or veil at home. Here is where a simple tip from yesteryear can save the day. Simply cut off a small branch and hold it in front of your face. The bees will not trouble you. Simple! And it really does work! Obviously, this still requires use of one hand, but it's really useful nevertheless. To avoid the need for either hand, arrange for the branch to tuck inside your shirt behind the neck, so that foliage is presented in front of your face. Yes, you have to use a modest and fairly leafy branch, but it takes little effort and does work! Jim Woollacott used this approach when he visited Horestone last year and was amazed that we hadn't seen anyone use it before. He's been doing it, like those he learnt from some 70 years ago, all his life.

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All contributions welcome; copy by the 23<sup>rd</sup> of the month for publication the following month.

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