

NORTHERN LIGHTS

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

MAY 2013

www.northdevonbees.org



Chair Chat

Like everyone else, I am wondering when the good weather will start.

We may not have been beekeeping, but the spring clean at the clubhouse has got well underway. We have a new kitchen and it all looks very clean and tidy. Thanks to everyone who helped.



Kay hard at work in the newly fitted kitchen

Horestone has dried out very well and we can now use the field opposite to park in. Please do not park in the wrong place and block our neighbours' entrance. They have the right of way and we must not cause them any inconvenience.

For all those who can't come on a Tuesday, we have two Taster Days and a Plant/Open day booked. If you can come and help or do an hour in the garden, we will be very pleased to see you all.

Barbara

Bee Quotes

'The keeping of bees is like the direction of sunbeams.'

Henry David Thoreau

Events 2013-14

Saturday 27 April	10.00 - 16.00	Table Top Display, Bideford College
Sunday 2 June	13.30 - 16.00	Plant Sales and Members Open Day, Horestone
Sunday 16 June	10.00 - 16.00	Dowland Country Fair, Nr Winkleigh EX19 8PG
Sunday 30 June	14.00 - 16.00	Taster Day, Horestone
Saturday 27 July	All Day	Mid-Devon Show, Nr Tiverton (in Rural Skills Marquee)
Wednesday 7 August	All Day	North Devon Show, Fishleigh Rock, Umberleigh
Sat 14 - Sun 15 Sept	All Day	Our Honey Show, St Johns Garden Centre, Barnstable
Thurs 3 October	19.00 - 21.00	Talk 'Bees and Flowers' by Leila Goss, Castle Centre, Barnstable
Thurs 16 January	19.00 - 21.00	Talk 'Bee Bits' by Chris Utting Castle Centre, Barnstable
Thurs 13 February	19.00 - 21.00	Talk 'Nosema' by Glyn Davis Castle Centre, Barnstable
Thurs 13 March	19.00 - 21.00	Talk 'Predator Mites' by Richard Ball Castle Centre, Barnstable

Julie's Jottings

May brings Beltane, that great festival of fecundity, life in abundance and the burgeoning of the green although if it doesn't bring the warmth we all crave there will be a lot of May Queens looking more blue with cold.

The continuing cold stupefies me, still struggling to emerge from winter hibernation and it is starving our bees. The last thing pollinators needed after such an appalling summer, autumn and winter was a spring that still hasn't arrived, a few foraging hours here and there is not enough. Colonies continue to die and most of us haven't opened our hives yet.

The Beginners class is approaching its last week and we shall need to put in some extra sessions to give them the 'hands on' practice they need.

The 3rd Tuesday in April at Horestone and the temperature didn't rise above 12.5C so still no colonies opened but the nearby oil seed rape is on the point of opening and we shall need to get some supers on; when it does warm up the season will take off in a rush. Even at 12.5C the bees were coming in covered with Dandelion, Prunus blossoms and a creamy white pollen, I wonder if it was from that harbinger of the new beekeeping season, the flowering currant.

The lack of pollen has been a major topic of concern and discussion at Horestone with some beekeepers resorting to feeding pollen supplements or substitutes. We have generally assumed that in this part of the West Country there is always plenty of pollen but with the experience of last autumn and now the late spring when even the Hazel catkins were burnt off by frost and icy winds this cannot be guaranteed.

Apart from the weather I see a general decline in the hedgerows of both early and late pollen suppliers due to that most hideous invention, the flail hedgecutter. Hedges and banks are battered into oblivion and even in places where they might manage to flower before any nuts or fruits can ripen for the birds and the myriad of small creatures who live in the banks they are massacred to a row of mutilated stumps. The cause of another insidious loss is the frequent widening of field gateways to accommodate the monstrous tractors progress demands, a loss of 6 feet of bank and vegetation each time this happens.

At least the enthusiasm to create community wildlife friendly areas around our towns and villages is continuing and we can all do our bit to help with this.

At Horestone the early spring flowers are glorious and we are pleased to see the Yellow rattle we sowed in the autumn has germinated well in the long grass areas. This should help curb the grass growth and allow the numerous bee friendly flowers we have been putting in to flourish.

To spread a few more good plants around come to the plant sale on June 2nd if you are not too busy by then chasing swarms.

Julie

Plant of the Month

MALUS DOMESTICA

Apple

Where would we be without English Apples? A lot worse off I reckon. We grow the best apples in the world, all due to our variable climate. Searching the web I discover there are 1,200 varieties with names like Barnack Beauty, Nutmeg pippin and Knobby Russet, I have two small trees, Chivers Delight and Ashmead's Colonel. The latter a long keeping russet, the former, also a long keeping, sharp, crisp desert.

What wonderful things we can do with them too, there must be thousands of recipes for the cooks to choose from and many different ways of growing them. Standard trees with 6ft trunks planted 100 years ago, small trees with a total height of 6ft planted in neat rows so that they can be mechanically harvested from weed free fields – I doubt the growers realise the significance of the weeds but, perhaps the message has got through with all the recent hype about bees. They can be fan or espalier trained against a wall, or, kept really short, with two long arms, used as a hedge against a footpath. These latter types require rigorous pruning, something which men seem to dislike doing!

Bees love the pollen which I think, like dandelion, is particularly nutritious, Bumbles and Solitary bees forage on them too but they don't appear to clash maybe that is because they forage early and late and on the shady side, whereas Honey Bees are more picky, flying between 10-00 and 4-00 and only on the sunny side. They take after me!

Kay



Member's Apiary: Derek Hunter



It's been a funny old year, just when you think you're beginning to get a handle on things they all change. At this time last year the bees were bringing in shed loads of pollen and nectar, the Queens were laying and every thing was on the up. This year the complete opposite, with the bees not flying most days due to the cold winds and the Queens laying very sparsely.

Beekeeping had for many years been some thing that I wanted to do, so a couple of months after moving to Devon I saw an article in the local paper that the local bee keeping association were holding an open day and along I went. I was very warmly welcomed and invited to visit on Tuesdays to get a taste of beekeeping which I did and enjoyed it. I did the beginners course the following year and start building up my hives.

I keep my hives in two apiaries, the main one is in the Orchard next to the house, this is a long narrow field running east west with a bank and high hedge running along the north side. Although it's a the top of a hill the hives are very sheltered from the cold north and north east winds, while enjoying an open aspect to the south and all day sun. The other one is in the valley were the hives are in the open but sheltered by a hedge and trees on the north side and enjoy a milder climate. Last year I was asked to move a couple of hive to a local plant nursery which worked well producing some very interesting tasting honey, some thing I'll be doing again this year. There is a mixture of forage around here a lot of hedgerow and small woodlands along with some large gardens with plenty of flowers and fruit trees, while most of the fields are either down to pasture or cereals.

All of my hives came though the winter with out problem, even the two which did not build up last Autumn. At the beginning of February I put fondant in all the hives on top of the crown board and most including the two weaker ones started taking it down. Generally I am of the opinion that you only open a hive if there is a definite reason for doing so, ie swarm control or checking for diseases, if not leave well alone as you can tell a lot on what's happening inside by watching the bees at the hive entrance. However the first Saturday this month you may remember was very warm with no wind and the bees flying so I decided to check in the hives to get a better idea of the amount of stores in them, I was very pleasantly surprised to find that not only had they all got plenty of stores it was also adjacent to the brood, the only disappointment was that the two weaker hives had died out. I suspect that, although they had stores in the frames where the cluster was, there were just not enough bees to keep the temperature up during the cold weather.



Derek

NORTH DEVON BRANCH

**SPRING
PLANT SALE
AND MEMBERS OPEN DAY
at Horestone
on Sunday 2nd June
13.30 - 16.00**

Come and buy plants of all kinds to embellish and
invigorate your garden
Tea, cakes and good company

Donations of plants and seedlings will be gratefully received

DBKA Celebrity Lecture 2013

On the 16th April a group of us went to Hannahs@ Seale Hayne to hear Maryann Frazier, entomology expert from Penn state University talk about **Managing Honeybee Parasites & Disease by Letting Them Be.**

Maryann began by dispelling our Media hyped images of the States, coast to coast CCD and endless truckloads of hives constantly on the move. American agriculture does demand that 1.5 million colonies are transported between the almonds, apples and blueberries and this does mean that 50% of the colonies in the hands of 1% of the beekeepers are used like this for pollination, a honey crop is not important, 95% of beekeepers have less than 10 hives and while they have their problems they are not being devastated by CCD. Most of these beekeepers are in the urban areas.

Colonies losses over the last 6 years average 1/3 although the figures were expected to be worse for this year across all types of beekeeping.

The theme of the lecture was the comparison between beekeeping in Kenya, where Maryann has & still is involved in education and research and the States, 2 very different styles of beekeeping. She defined these as :-

Economically driven ie driven by beekeepers needs & demands for maximum profit ie the USA system. &

Biologically Driven ie motivated by the bees needs, the Kenyan system

Despite some decline in productivity among Kenyan bees in the last 5 years the bees are not being decimated by Nosema or Varroa (found there in 2009) as in other parts of the world. She asked 'Are the bees more tolerant?'

With European pollinators in decline and CCD an on going problem in the States Maryann listed the possible reasons as:- poor nutrition, stress, mites, pesticides, genetics, viruses & nosema.

Research between 2007-2012 found an incredible list of 132 different pesticides in & around bees and their products: an average of 6 different pesticides are found in pollen samples.

When asked about herbicides Maryann said very little work had been done to indicate whether they were toxic or detrimental to pollinators but the biggest problem they created was eliminating many useful forage plants and adding to nutritional problems.

A major factor in the health of USA honeybees is the dubious quality of the Package Bees imported each year to make up losses.

The transition from 'wild' to managed bee has fostered the build up & spread of parasites & diseases with too many colonies kept together.

In Kenya, humans adapt to the bees needs with 95% of the honey produced coming from traditional log hives and she questioned the 'wisdom' of Aid agencies encouraging Western ways of beekeeping (an ongoing experiment comparing a wide range of western style hives is being evaluated).

Traditional log hives hung in trees out of the way of predators are economical to use as they last years and are often passed down through families and have the advantage of being:- more attractive to swarms, producing more honey in drought conditions, bees protect themselves with an envelope of propolis & they are well insulated and suited to tropical conditions.

The indigenous bees in Kenya have quite different characteristics to our western *Apis Mellifera* in that they swarm up to 14 times a year and can migrate/abscond to more favourable areas ie to the cooler hilly areas returning again when conditions are more favourable. This must be an important factor in leaving pests and diseases behind, apparently brood diseases have never been found in East Africa. The East African bees also have a shorter brood development time giving less time for Varroa to develop, the varroa breed almost always in the drone brood so workers are relatively undamaged by the mites.

Maryann asked 'How can we utilise this knowledge of Kenyan Beekeeping to maintain healthy and profitable colonies in the West? The answers were:-

To start thinking about the bees, their needs & convenience, not the beekeepers (beekeepers should be better educated and informed)

Study apiaries in different geographical regions

Assess the effect of management practices on colony strength and health

Examine the effect of genotype in different regions.

This was a very fascinating lecture from a lady who has devoted her life to researching the problems

Julie

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