

NORTHERN LIGHTS

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

MAY 2015

www.northdevonbees.org



Chair Chat

The Apiary is full of life. Growing conditions for the plants has been perfect so we have been trying to cut the grass before the bees are up and out, and to reduce the growth around the edges.

The beginners had a fine day for opening three hives on Sunday. They have two more sessions before the course ends. Most of the students are of working age so may not be able to visit the apiary on a Tuesday.

Now that more people are attending on Tuesdays, we need to use the field for parking. The cows are back so the electric fence is needed.

Mave

The Big Bee Picture

From 1 - 31 May, gardeners and beekeepers can take part in the second annual Great British Bee Count.

The data collected will provide a picture of bee populations and diversity.

This year participants can also upload photos. Organised by **Friends of the Earth** and sponsored by Waitrose.

Go to www.greatbritishbeecount.co.uk

Chris Utting

Events 2015

21- 23 May	Devon County Show, West-point
21 June	Dowland Fair
25 July	Mid Devon Show, Knight-shayes
5 August	North Devon Show, Umber-leigh
12 -13 Sep-tember	Branch Honey Show, St Johns Garden Centre, Barn-staple

Bee Quotes

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

Bernard Shaw 'Man and Superman'

Committee News

Last month we held a small meeting at Horestone in clear evening sunlight.

There are various outstanding jobs, such as reviewing the inventory and sorting the Show shed, which will be done when we have poor weather! The colonies keep everyone busy on Tuesdays at present so we are waiting for a rainy day. (Rain is also needed soon as our water supply is getting low)

As mentioned in Chair Chat, we have mainly working people on the beginners' course so a weekend opening of the apiary is under discussion.

We have also considered whether those helping on Tuesdays should wear their own beesuits as keeping the apiary's suits clean falls to 'someone'.

Of course, if you wish to comment on the above or to raise an issue with the committee, please do so.

Mave on behalf of the Committee

Branch Nosema Clinic

The clinic was set up in the Castle Centre Small Room by 10.00am on Sunday 12 April. A team of eight members manned the reception, slide making and microscopy sections until 2.00pm. Unfortunately, only eight other members provided bee samples for examination.

It is very disappointing that members choose to ignore such a good disease diagnosis service.

Although I was very reluctant to organise this event after the poor support that we experienced last year, your committee was keen to continue to provide this service for the benefit of the members.

The results with last year's figures in brackets:

Members supplying samples	16 (14)
Samples examined	70 (64)
No Nosema found	63 (46)
Light Nosema levels found	11 (10)
Medium Nosema levels found	3 (6)
High Nosema levels found	2 (2)

Chris Utting - Branch Microscopist

Tree of the Month - Holly *Ilex aquifolium*



There is an abundance of crops, wild and garden flowers for the bees to work in the merry month of May. David Charles reminded us recently in his talks at Holsworthy and Barnstaple just how valuable so many trees are to bees, how much income an average sized tree can provide compared to a patch of meadow or a few packets of annual flowers sown in the garden.

Holly, our most common evergreen tree, so well known and loved in woods, hedgerows and gardens with so many pagan and Christian associations is often overlooked as a 'bee tree'. It flowers for 2 – 3 weeks in May and into June often bridging that gap between the top fruit and later sources of income. Its small white, fragrant flowers secrete nectar freely and is well worked by honeybees for nectar and pollen which is a dull greenish yellow. In parts of N. America a honey crop can be obtained from the Hollies. The male and female flowers are borne on separate trees (dioecious) so both are needed for nectar and pollen. The cultivated varieties are as useful as the wild holly but beware if you are buying plants as the horticultural trade seems determined to confuse us by calling a male 'Silver Queen' and a female 'Golden King'.

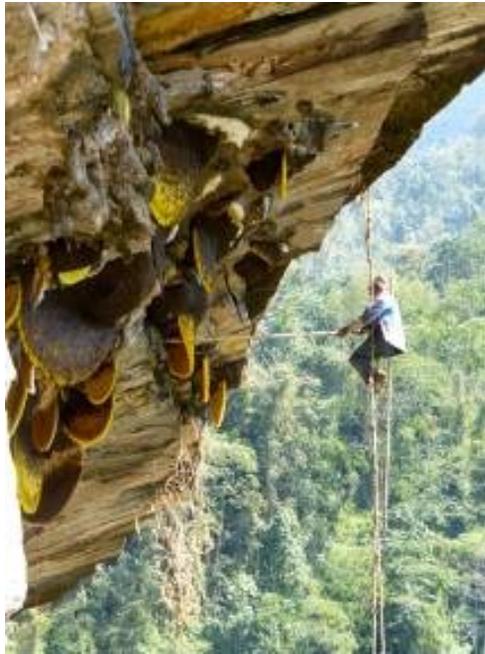
F.N. Howes tells that it can be an erratic flowerer, sometimes producing no flowers for several seasons or flowers on one side only but still a tree worth planting in the garden as there are far fewer free standing trees in the hedgerows since the arrival of that monstrous machine, the flail cutter. There are of course less hedgerows too to provide a home for it. I'm glad the trees in our local woods and one very beautiful hedgerow tree seem to flower regularly

and I hope it is my bees that I hear busily working them each year.

Julie

The Honey Gatherers of Nepal

Next time you pop down to collect honey from your hives, spare a thought for Bhim, a Nepalese honey gatherer from the foothills of the Annapurna region. Each year Bhim and his fellow Gurung villagers trek for two hours into the mountains, until they reach the base of a 50-metre high rock face. There, suspended from the roof of the cliff, hang dozens of semi-circular golden discs of honeycomb, constructed by the largest



honeybee in the world, the Himalayan honey bee (*Apis laboriosa*).

I recently travelled with a BBC TV crew to film the honey gatherers harvesting these gigantic combs.

Collecting the honey is no mean feat. To begin with, the sheer cliff is only accessible from above. The villagers fashion a rope ladder, using

thin strips of bamboo twisted together for rope. Whilst one team climbs up to the top of the cliff and secures top of the rope ladder, another team gathers huge piles of leaves at the base of the cliff, directly under the honeycombs. These piles are then burnt, sending plumes of smoke up into the air, dislodging the bees from the combs, until the air is thick with smoke and bees. The rope ladder is then thrown down from above, com-



ing to rest only a few feet away from the combs.

This is the moment that 68-year old Bhim has been waiting all year for. Wearing nothing more than a thin nylon jacket and no gloves or head net, he gingerly climbs down the rope ladder until he is level with the combs. The bees furiously attack him, but his leathery skin is no match for their stings. He merely swats them away as if they were nothing more than an annoying fly. With no harness to prevent him from falling, Bhim simply hooks his bare feet around the rope ladder to brace himself.

A long bamboo pole is then lowered on a rope to him, with a removable toggle attached to its end by another piece of twine. Holding on to the rope ladder with one hand, he manoeuvres the pole as expertly as would a medieval knight, holding a jousting lance. He pokes a hole through the honeycomb until the wooden toggle detaches itself on the back side, anchoring the



honeycomb. Bhim shouts up to his cliff-top team to now take the strain of the toggled rope, as he begins to cut through the 50kg honeycomb, using another pole, this time with a curved knife attached to it. The blade easily carves through the wax and in seconds the golden disc is cut free, swinging away from the cliff on the rope, followed by its angry inhabitants.

The cliff-top team gently lower their gilded prize down to the ground, as Bhim eyes up another honeycomb to harvest. Only a few honeycombs are removed, and the majority are left untouched. The Gurung only take what they need and leave the rest as nature intended. After loading up their wicker backpacks with as much honeycomb as they can carry, they hike back to their village to share their winnings with the whole community.

In order to film this sequence, required us to wear full bee suits, which given the oppressive heat and humidity of Nepal, wasn't the most comfortable job I've ever done. Thankfully though, the suits protected us from the bees. However, our cameraman did get stung on his ring finger, which swelled up so much that I had to perform emergency surgery and cut it off using a pair of wire cutters!

Mark Roberts

Sylvie has asked me to assure everyone that her friend, Mark Roberts, is safe from the effects of the major earthquake in Nepal - Sylvie received that following by e mail from Mark:

'The Nepal earthquake struck the same spot we were camping in last month. I was shocked when I heard the news and worried for my fixer and his team. Thankfully all of the honeygatherers from our Gurung village are safe, and my Nepalese fixer Ram is busy helping keep people alive in Kathmandu as well as Everest Base Camp. It's an absolute tragedy'

If you would like to make a donation to the Nepal earthquake appeal then go to www.dec.org.uk.

Jeff

What the Microscopist Saw



A microscopist view of a nosema slide X 400 magnification

Have you ever wondered what lies beneath the microscope slide with regard to beekeeping?

Over the next few months I hope to bring you a snap shot of their minature world.

Graham Kingham

Professor Keith Delaplane lecture

Chris Utting and I travelled to Seale Hayne College to listen to the DBKA's guest lecturer Professor Keith Delaplane.

He started with the why and how of hymenoptera evolution cast differentiation, multiple matings, order from chaos, why hexagon cells? By our 'domestication' are we pushing them beyond their limits? Does this play a part in their recent decline? Should we perhaps care for their more natural pattern of living?

The biomass of a colony is equal to that of a dog, [you would not starve a dog] in the winter you feed it every day but the bees should be fed once, not in dribs and drabs, sufficient food to last until well into spring (other research puts this at **8 full** frames of stores).

He explained that even a slight shortage of food affects them, because bees have to start to foraging earlier than normal, thus leaving a gap in house bee duties which needs to be filled, upsetting their natural progression. Only 8.5% of swarms which go 'wild' will survive, most of them die of starvation during their first winter. We can prevent this in our colonies by correct feeding.

I will finish by reiterating his conclusions:

- Reduce colony density per sq km
- Encourage propolis
- Allow Drone saturation

Although he never touched on it, bees do require a great diversity of pollen too.

Kay

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