

NORTHERN LIGHTS

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

MAY 2016

www.northdevonbees.org



USEFUL LINKS

DEVON BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION
www.devonbeekeepers.org.uk

BRITISH BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION
www.bbka.org.uk



Two very strong colonies in Chris Utting's apiary in mid April. Commercial hives with 8 frames of sealed brood. So strong that they are in danger of issuing early swarms or starting in this cold Spring. Two supers were quickly added and they were fed with syrup. A Shook Swarm procedure will be used when the weather gets warmer - at least 16°C.

Mild winter results in limited edition honey

Sarah Howells

sarah.howells@nhs.uk

There is a new addition to the shelves at Quince Honey Farm – and once it's gone it's not known if or when it will be back.

The 'limited edition' Ivy honey is the rare product of this year's milder winter season.

Bees do not usually produce enough honey to harvest during the cold months, and many lose a proportion of their colony.

But Quince Honey Farm's Ian Wallace said this year had been so mild, beekeepers had been able to yield a crop of the special Ivy honey.

This year and more floral in taste than its popular clover counterpart, the Ivy honey is on sale at the working honey farm in South Molton.

Ian said: "We were surprised to see we were still getting honey in October and November."

"We normally get a little bit, but we got quite a bit and managed to harvest some."

"In all the time I have been here I don't remember getting honey during the winter like this."

Ian said when his father, Paddy Wallace, ran the farm he lost about five per cent of his bees during the winter – but now it is



■ Ian Wallace and Ruby Mapp, of Quince Honey Farm, with the new honey. Picture SARAH HOWELLS

more like 20-25 per cent each year.

The honey farm has 1,100 hives and produces around 80,000 jars of the sweet stuff every year.

It has undergone a number of refurbishments in the last five years, including an indoor play area and a Critter Cabin.

The latest addition is live beekeeping demonstrations.

Ian said: "We had everything else except someone people could watch the real thing."

"It's great, people can get so close and they can ask questions as the honeyseper works."

■ Quince Honey Farm is open seven days a week. Find it in North Road, South Molton.

cutting from the North Devon Gazette 27April 2016

Chair Chat

The lanes to Horestone are very beautiful with flowers and spring vegetation in spite of the continuing cold winds. I love driving to the apiary as this is a complete contrast to my previous home area in S E London. To view the Devon Beekeeping website (www.devonbeekeepers.org.uk) you will need the user name: members@devonbeekeepers.org.uk and the password: mouseguard5

Last year we 'borrowed' seasonal bee inspectors from other areas. This year our inspector is Eric James (eric.james@apha.gsi.gov.uk) All members are encouraged to register with Beebase. Reports about notifiable diseases, in the member's area, are automatically sent via email from Beebase. The Beebase website is full of information and advice. If you have concerns about your bees, do contact Eric with a description and, if possible, a photograph, of the combs. There are still places available for the visit to the Buckfast Abbey apiaries on Sunday, June 26th. Please contact Alan Barrow for the details.

The Beginners course ends on May 8th. This will be followed by four Beekeeping Sundays held on the third Sunday in the month starting in June. Please see the poster for details.

The Skep Making course has ended with assorted results....small, large, tidy, untidy, tulip-shaped but mainly unfinished skeps. We had a great time 'knitting' straw. I hope the swarms will like our efforts.....if only the skeps will stay intact! I know some members were disappointed as the course filled up very quickly. If there is a demand, we could arrange for the course to run again next year.

Happy beekeeping. Mave

HOW TO COLLECT A SWARM (part two) by Chris Utting

Never use the words 'always' or 'never' when it comes to describing honeybee behaviour. So the words 'probably', possibly and 'usually' always come to mind as bees have not read the same books as me.

A



Typical swarm in a cluster on a small tree: Observe the bees on the surface. Look for the bee dance. If they are all dancing in the same direction the swarm is about to leave the tree to head for their new home. If the dance is offering differing directions they will not leave - yet. If they are still (quiescent) with no dance they are not leaving for some time. The swarm may stay put for 30 minutes or two weeks. Freshly swarmed bees are stuffed with honey and are unlikely to sting. If they have left a colony that has a clipped queen they will probably return to the hive within 30 minutes. If you have an open mesh floor they will cluster under the wire mesh. You will have to shake/brush them back into the brood box and replace the floor with a solid floor. Then carry out an artificial swarm procedure. Some of the sealed queen cells can be used to make up a nucleus or mini nuc.



Preparing to collect the swarm: Spread the sheet out on the ground as near as is convenient to the cluster. Put on your veil etc. Make sure that observers are a safe distance away. The public tend to panic when they get lost bees in their hair.



Preparing to shake the bees into the skep: A cardboard box is difficult to hold. A brood or nuc box is heavy. A straw skep is ideal as it is light, easy for the beekeeper to support and easier for the bees to grip when they are inside. I have three skeps—small, big and biggest to suit different locations. This is my biggest skep. The cluster of bees are blissfully unaware of the excitement that about to be thrust on their existence.



And everything changes.: A short, sharp shake and the cluster drops into the skep. Be prepared for the sudden increase in the weight of the skep. About 50% of the bees will rise into the air; some will start to join the old cluster site. Yes I did forget to zip up my veil. But no bee entered where it should not be and not a single sting was experienced although a few dozen confused bees landed on my head.



5 seconds later: About 25% of the bees are in the skep where the queen should be. The rest are flying in confusion and some are landing on the old cluster site.



A further 5 seconds later: The skep is gently turned upside down and placed in the centre of the sheet with one edge lifted on a brick as a temporary entrance. If possible cut off the part of the shrub from which the swarm was hanging and put it in the skep as the queen pheromone on the shrub still attracts the swarm.



Look closer: Several bees are standing at the entrance to the skep furiously fanning their wings. This informs me that the queen is inside the skep and the collection is probably going to be successful.



Look closer still: Notice the white spots at tip of the abdomen. They are exposing the Nasonov gland and circulating a pheromone that informs the flying bees that this is home and the queen is inside. You return at dusk and gently remove the brick, lower the skep on to the sheet, gather the sheet on top of the skep and tie with string and take them away. As bees usually come home to roost at night you should be able to take away every bee.

SWARM COLLECTORS

The BBKA website homepage www.bbka.org.uk provides the public with guidance on how to identify a swarm of bees together with a postcode list of members provided by the North Devon Branch and Devon BKA and who are available to collect swarms. The list includes the following members. Please note that Chris Utting and Kay Thomas are not available.

Ruth Blake 01805 601 330

Cliff Davis 01769 573 194

Derek Hunter 01805 623 283

Jack Mummery 01598 760 209

Bridget Simmons 01769 540 487

Judith Westcott 01769 572 225

Sharon Williams 01271 855 510

Alan White 01271 859 591

BRANCH COMMITTEE SUMMARY FOR APRIL

Our membership Secretary, Brian Sharp, reported that we have 77 paid-up members compared to 84 last year. Members do join during the year especially so if they are unsure about the winter survival rate.

Again we discussed the problems around working members, and especially beginners, being unable to attend on Tuesdays for hands-on beekeeping. We decided to open on four Sundays starting on the third Sunday in June. Please see the poster for the details.

Setting up a bulk order from Thornes was discussed as we used to do this in the past to avoid high delivery charges. There will be a list on the notice board at Horestone for members to use. Payment must be made at the time of ordering.

Barbara is our Show Secretary. We decided not to form a Show Committee but that Barbara would be relying on volunteers to help her. The next event will be at St John's Garden Centre on June 4th and 5th.

The next committee meeting will be held on Monday 9th May. If there are matters you would like us to consider, do get in touch.

Mave, on behalf of the Committee.

Wanted

The printer at Horestone apiary has broken down. Please have you got a spare one we could buy or borrow? In particular, we need one which will photocopy. The computer system is old and runs on Windows 98 so the printer needs to be compatible with this. Please contact me if you are able to help.

Mave

David and Goliath

TIM ROBERTS

Everyone loves a David and Goliath story and this week I came across a good one that is set in Africa and Sri Lanka and also has the local flavour of a PhD student from the University of Newcastle.

Kylie Butler is working with Dr Lucy King, who is head of an award-winning human-elephant co-existence program in Kenya. Both researchers are dealing with the problem of wild elephants coming out of the jungle to raid the gardens and crops of local villagers.

As you might imagine, the villagers object strongly to these night raids on their crops and livelihoods and retaliate with bullets, rocks and firecrackers to scare the elephants off. Death and injury to both humans and elephants often results. Along came Lucy King with a simply brilliant solution that could both keep the village farms safe and also protect the elephants from harm.

She devised a bee-fence. And it worked. Elephants avoid bees at all costs and if they hear bees buzzing then they buzz off to avoid the sting of this tiny creature. They also signal to others in their herd that they also should clear the area.

Bee-fencing involves building single-wire fencing around the area of farmland to be protected and suspending beehives on the wire at intervals along the fence. When an elephant knocks the wire the hives swing and the disturbed bees fly out. The buzzing is sufficient to make the elephants leave. Further value is added by the pollination services, honey and beeswax that the bees provide.

From the Nimbin Natural Beekeepers Club of New Zealand Newsletter May 2015 supplied by Beryl Smailes

Veiled in this fragile, filigree of wax is the essence of sunshine, golden and limpid, tasting of grassy meadows, mountain wildflowers, lavishly blooming orange trees or scrubby desert weeds. Honey, even more than wine is a reflection of place. If the process of grape to glass is alchemy then the trail from blossom to bottle is one of reflection. The nectar collected by the bee is the spirit and sap of the plant, its sweet juice. Honey is the flower transmuted, its scent and beauty transformed into aroma and taste.

Author unknown. Submitted by Julie Elkin



Beehives get area buzzing for charities

Quince Honey Farm shows support for two breast cancer charities.

By Francesca Taffs

francesca@northdevonjournal.co.uk

PINK beehives have been popping up around North Devon thanks to a collaboration between Quince Honey Farm and two breast cancer charities.

Quince, which is based in South Molton, has teamed up with Lisa Wallis who recently set up her charity, ChemoHero, and Heather Walters who is fundraising to set up a new cancer support centre in North Devon.

As a result, the pink beehives can be seen around the area as a mark of support for the charities, and Quince Honey Farm will also be donating 50p to the charities for every customer who visits the farm over Easter.

The Journal reported in October 2014 that Lisa was looking to set up her own charity to provide "hopefully helpful bags" for young people who have been diagnosed with cancer when they go for their first treatment.

Lisa went through chemotherapy herself after being diagnosed with breast cancer so knows first-hand what people need to get them through the tough time.

When her treatment had finished she decided to provide a box of essential goodies for other young women going through what she went through, and she would deliver the boxes per-

sonally to patients and offer support. Since then, ChemoHero has evolved and expanded and now provides chemotherapy boxes for all chemotherapy patients, not just young women.

Lisa has been supported by a number of local businesses, namely Swallowfield Cosmetics in Bideford, Blugem Communications in Barnstaple, Youngs Wholesalers in Barnstaple and Bullards grocery store in North Molton.

Heather Walters, who is a Journal columnist, started her breast cancer campaign after being diagnosed with the condition in 2014.

She has raised tens of thousands of pounds for charity CoppaFeel, and is now in the process of fundraising to set up North Devon's first cancer support centre.

There is currently no such service available in North Devon.

Karina Wallace, from Quince Honey Farm, is currently being treated for breast cancer.

She received a ChemoHero box from Lisa last year.

She said: "I found the box a tremendous source of comfort and also everything in the box gave me an indication of what to expect."

Karina is receiving some of her treatment in Exeter where she said the support network available is so much better than North Devon, so Heather's fundraising would make a massive difference to cancer patients up here.

Well done Quince Honey Farm. The owner, Paddy Wallace, is an Honorary Life Member of the branch. Some of these distinctive hives can be seen in a large open field on the south-east corner of Roundswell roundabout.

Taken from the North Devon Journal See www.thebreastcancersite.greatergood.com for more information.

OIL SEED RAPE

Fields of gold or brash sulphurous yellow? It depends whether you are a love it or loath it beekeeper but there's no ignoring the steady increase of Brassica napus all around us. Many newer beekeepers will be anticipating their first honey crop from its copious nectar flows so a few notes about dealing with the problems that can be associated with OSR seem appropriate.

Rape seed is sown in both Autumn and Spring so the flowering period can extend from late March to early July and honey crops can be very large. A mixed blessing for those who prefer other floral sources giving more distinctive flavoured honeys. OSR is self fertile and can set a good crop without the attention of pollinators but the advantage to the grower of 'blanket' pollination is that it reduces the period of seed set and maximises yields.

The problems and the solutions associated with OSR are as follows:-

EARLY FLOWS BEFORE COLONIES ARE AT FULL STRENGTH. Beekeepers who take bees to the rape and may have pollination contracts to fulfil need to build colonies up to full strength ready for the flow. This is achieved by re-queening in August/September so colonies have young vigorous queens and can be fed from late winter onwards. The danger here is that if the weather is poor and the rape doesn't yield or bees can't fly you have a lot of very hungry bees that will need continued feeding. Most hobbyists prefer to let the colonies build up on the early income ready to take advantage of the later flows. (Rape also provides good quality pollen with 31.9% protein although bees will also be working dandelion, gorse, clover and blackberry for pollen as well).

SWARMING. Strong colonies especially if they have been built up early plus a good flow will be more inclined to swarm. Young queens can help to offset this, also ensuring the colony has plenty of room to expand both brood nest and super space for 'hanging' out the nectar.

RAPID GRANULATION. OSR nectar like all Brassicas has a high glucose content which leads to rapid granulation even in the combs. Combs must be **removed as soon as filled**, generally about 80% sealed is enough provided that when shaken droplets of liquid honey don't fly out. If clearing with Porter bee escapes or similar clearing devices remember to put an empty super(s) on top of the brood box so the bees have somewhere to go. Extract immediately, while still warm and run through a coarse strainer into buckets with well sealing lids. The granulated honey will need to be warmed for bottling. Despite this seeming problem OSR honey is excellent for blending with stronger flavoured honeys, for creaming and for seeding other honeys that naturally granulate coarsely to give a fine textured creamed product. One disadvantage with the later OSR flows is that they can interfere with the production of cut comb and sections where the granulation is unacceptable.

INFERIOR TASTE TO OTHER HONEYS. Considered by some to be rather insipid but the honey buying public in taste tests mostly like it and it sells well. Fortunately the breeders have bred out that awful cabbage smell that used to waft from the extractor and when the honey was warmed!

DISEASE SPREAD. Always a bee Inspector's nightmare when a lot of colonies come into an area, EFB can be rife so be vigilant with disease checks and call in your local inspector if in doubt.

INSECTICIDES. Every beekeepers nightmare! OSR grown on the scale it is now can be destroyed by pollen beetle and seed weevil so pesticide use is inevitable. Whether used as a seed dressing or spray all pesticides are damaging to pollinators and we are all aware of the ongoing research and controversy into what is used and how it is applied. All a beekeeper can do is liaise with the grower to reassure themselves that the rules concerning spraying, i.e. not when in full flower and at times when bees aren't flying, late p.m. or very early a.m., are being followed. We rarely hear these days of the mass killings of bees that the older pesticides caused but damage now is more insidious and equally worrying.

Enjoy the crop and know that it never runs off your toast in the mornings.

DARG (Devon Apicultural Research Group) 2016 QUEEN SURVEY

Have you noticed over the last couple of years that your queens are not performing as well as usual? Is the colony superseding more often? Is your new queen becoming a drone layer after only a few months when queens used to last for a couple of years without any problems? Many of us who have been beekeepers for a few years have noticed that there is a trend that involves problems with our queens.

The members of DARG have noticed this too and have decided gather together queens and have a closer look at the reproductive system. Has the queen run out of sperm; has the store of sperm died; is there a virus that we are not aware of?

We are looking for help from beekeepers and asking for **live queens that you intend to replace**. Queens that may be drone layers, have a poor brood pattern, produce a bad tempered colony, have a tendency to swarm, fail to build up the colony or even spare virgins or even elderly healthy queens being routinely replaced.

DARG have appointed twenty queen collectors in Devon, Cornwall and Somerset. The North Devon Collectors are Chris Utting (01237 474 500) and Peter Auger (01237 473 710). If you have a live queen which you can offer then please 'phone us. We will arrange to take the queen from your apiary and send it to the DARG coordinator, Glyn Davies.

DARG have a website which covers topics that is of great interest to the hobbyist beekeeper see www.dargbees.org.uk/

Chris

NOTES FROM HORESTONE

We've had snowdrops, crocus, willow and now dandelions out – but still the weather is chilly and windy, we even had snow this Tuesday. So far it looks as though overwintering has been favourable. The colonies have been taking in lots of pollen – there is plenty of debris on the inserts below the mesh floors showing activity in the cluster above. We have continued with hefting and putting fondant on the lighter colonies – and keeping a record of the mite fall. We have only had one Tuesday afternoon where it was warm enough to properly check some of the colonies and change the woodwork – and check the number of seams of bees under the crown boards for all the rest. The two poly nucs were transferred into National's. Now we are just waiting for the weather to pick up so that the rest of the colonies can be properly assessed.

Meanwhile the equipment is prepared and ready. Foundation is made up, record sheets are ready, a thorough tidy up of the grounds and buildings has been done. We plan to open Horestone one Sunday a month, and hope to see some of the Beginners and anyone who is unable to come on a Tuesday. The dates will be published in the newsletter – come along for a coffee, chat and hive inspection if you can – and an opportunity to share our beekeeping experiences.

Sylvie

When daisies pied and violets blue,
And lady-smocks all silver-white,
And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue
Do paint the meadows with delight.

Love's Labour's Lost

**To commemorate 400 years
since William Shakespeare's death**

Edited by Chris Utting e-mail chrisutting@btinternet.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