

# NORTHERN LIGHTS

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

NOVEMBER 2016

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



## USEFUL LINKS

DEVON BEEKEEPERS'  
ASSOCIATION

[www.devonbeekeepers.org.uk](http://www.devonbeekeepers.org.uk)

BRITISH BEEKEEPERS'  
ASSOCIATION

[www.bbka.org.uk](http://www.bbka.org.uk)

## WINTER PROGRAMME 2016/17 OF BRANCH EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY

**SUNDAY NOVEMBER 6 at 2.00pm**  
**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**  
**CASTLE CENTRE, BARNSTAPLE**

**SATURDAY NOVEMBER 26 7.00pm ANNUAL SKITTLES EVENING AT  
THE PLOUGH, BICKINGTON**

**BY 31 DECEMBER 31 SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE DUE**

**WEDNESDAY 25 JANUARY 7.30pm TALK JULIE ELKINS 'THE ROSE  
HIVE'**

**WEDNESDAY 22 FEBRUARY 7.30pm TALK PHIL CHANDLER 'THE TOP  
BAR HIVE'**

**WEDNESDAY 22 MARCH 7.30pm TALK DAVID PACKAHAM 'LIVING  
WITH VARROA'**

## Bees sniff out plants with a virus

Research has discovered that bumblebees are more attracted to the scent of virus-infected tomatoes than that of healthy plants.

It is known that viruses make plants more attractive to aphids, but scientists have now found it can change the behaviour of pollinators, too. Experiments at Cambridge University Botanic Garden found bumblebees had a marked preference for plants infected with *Cucumber mosaic virus*. The better pollination led to more fruit (higher reproduction), which could decrease the possibility of virus-resistant strains emerging. The phenomenon also means the virus can 'pay back' its host, allowing virus-susceptible plant strains to out-compete resistant ones.

8 The Garden | October 2016



## ASIAN HORNET- EASY RECOGNITION POINTS

(see page 2 for details)

## Committee Summary 24th October 2016

During the winter the committee meets in The Cedars, Bickington, as the lane to Horestone may flood, the hut is cold and the evenings very dark.

We have been discussing changes to the Branch website to improve security. Ruth Blake has been updating the site for us.

Our treasurer, Lynda, has had our accounts scrutinized. All is well as our income and our-goings balance. Most of our income is generated by Cathy and the Education Team.

It is suggested that the work-station near the equipment hut at the apiary needs to be improved. Also the huts need a coat of preservative. These tasks will be carried out during the winter.

Mave on behalf of the Committee

# Asian Hornet

**Alert!**

Report sightings of this species to:  
alernnonnative@ceh.ac.uk

## Species Description

**Scientific name:** *Vespa velutina*

**AKA:** Yellow-legged Hornet

**Native to:** Asia

**Habitat:** Nests usually high in trees and man made structures, sometimes closer to the ground; hunts honey bees, other insects and also feeds on fruit and flowers.

Not easily confused with any other species. Dark brown or black velvety body. Characteristically dark abdomen and yellow tipped legs. Smaller than the native European Hornet.

Introduced to France in 2004 where it has spread rapidly. In 2016 the first UK sighting was confirmed in Gloucestershire. High possibility of introduction through, for example, soil associated with imported plants, cut flowers, fruit, garden items (furniture, plant pots), freight containers, or in/on untreated timber. The possibility that it could fly across the Channel has not been ruled out.

A highly aggressive predator of native insects. Poses a significant threat to honey bees and other pollinators.

**Do not disturb an active nest. Members of the public who suspect they have found an Asian Hornet should send a photo to alernnonnative@ceh.ac.uk.**

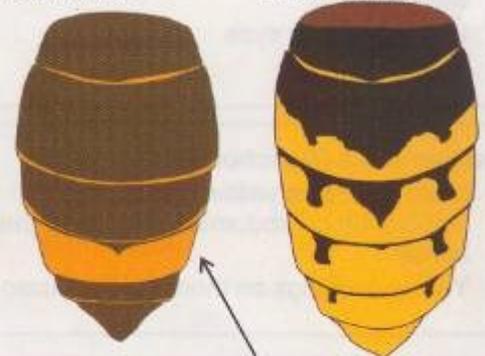


## Key ID Features



Asian Hornet

European Hornet



Asian Hornet abdomen is almost entirely dark except for 4th abdominal segment.



Asian hornet "hawking" for honey bee prey

# The Meadow at Horestone

Meadows are fashionable, everywhere they are being re-created see [www.magnificentmeadows.org.uk](http://www.magnificentmeadows.org.uk) in the National Trust magazine sums up their importance and appeal, 'Meadows are one of the country's most ecologically important and beautiful landscapes, supporting wildlife including fungi, bees, butterflies and reptiles. They are also one of the most threatened and just 2% of wildflower meadows that existed in the 1930s exist today'. I would add to that list small mammals, moths and other insects and ground nesting birds.



Inspired by the national enthusiasm, a lecture at Holsworthy beekeepers convention, plus free seeds and Rosemoor's beautiful acres humming with insects we decided it was time to make this the year of the meadow at Horestone. Tired of looking at the dreary wildness of docks and hogweed (on your left as you go from the meeting hut up to Cliff's cabin) and having had a couple of abortive attempts to introduce more attractive and useful wildflowers a few of us determined to make it happen this year.

We began by deadheading and deadheading (with docks they say 1 year's seed is 7 years weed!), then dug out roots buying a grubber to help us. If anyone has an old fashioned heavy duty dock grubber lying unused at the back of the shed we'd be delighted to have it, the new daisy/dandelion grubbers just don't have the same depth and leverage for those tap roots. Tai has strimmed and strimmed with all the top growth being raked off before scarifying the surface. Hundreds of plug plants have been put in, mixed wildflower seed sown and now Yellow Rattle has been added, this is semi parasitic on the grass roots and so helps to

open up the sward to allow the flowers to grow.

It's already looking a lot better and best of all it has become a great community activity as more and more people joined in.



As we progressed we realised more sunlight was needed on the meadow so the surrounding tree canopy had to be raised, no sooner thought of than David appeared with his chainsaw and a happy band of helpers made short work of that job. We know we will be down



on our hands and knees next spring grubbing out the docks and hogweed but the vision of a sunny flowery meadow awash with insects will continue to inspire us. So sharpen your scythes and prepare to join in next August with the first mowing.

*photos by Victoria (Tai) Dykes*

Julie Elkin

## Talk: Wildlife and changes on Braunton Burrows

Dolton Village Hall

Fri 18 7.30 - 9.30pm

An illustrated talk by local expert John Breeds. Adults £2.50 Children free. No booking required. Diana Goodacre on 01805 603 937.

Organised by

Halsdon & Dolton DWT local group

## Talk: Plants with mettle

Castle Centre, Castle St,  
Barnstaple EX31 1DR

Fri 11 7.30 - 10pm

Botanist and ecologist, Professor Alan Baker's research career has centred on the interaction between plants and soils contaminated by heavy metals. Donation of £3 per person including refreshments.

Organised by Barnstaple and District DWT local group

## Membership renewal 2017

It's that time of year again! The bees are all tucked up for the winter and thoughts turn to renewing memberships for the new year.

For 2017, Devon has provided all branches with a new style membership form (plus guidance notes) and these will be emailed out during November to all existing members. Those members who do not have access to email will receive a posted copy. Any member who has not received their form by the end of November should contact me and I will send one through.

Membership runs from 1 January to 31 December each year, so to ensure you continue to receive regular newsletters/magazines and email notifications from North Devon, Devon and the BBKA it is strongly recommended that you renew before the end of the year, otherwise you may stop receiving these, albeit temporarily. Insurance cover is also dependent on up-to-date membership, and this may also lapse if renewal is late.

A number of members have previously enquired about paying for membership by direct bank transfer, and we are pleased to announce that this is now possible, so you can now pay by cash, cheque or bank transfer, whichever suits you best. Details regarding payment can be found on the membership form, or you can contact our Treasurer Lynda Partridge ([peartree36@sky.com](mailto:peartree36@sky.com)) if you have any specific queries.

2017 also sees the launch of the new Members Pack which will be automatically emailed to all new and renewing members on receipt of their completed membership form and payment. There should be something of interest for all members in the pack, as it provides details of membership benefits, a potted history of North Devon branch and branch facilities, some interesting facts about past and present 'members of note', together with useful contact details. This pack will be updated every year and should be a useful resource for everyone. I hope you enjoy reading it.

Brian Sharp  
Membership Secretary ([bjsharp@outlook.com](mailto:bjsharp@outlook.com))

## Chair Chat

Now that beekeeping at Horestone is restricted to hefting and checking that the hives are secure, our attention is focused to the remaining three events before the New Year.

Please come to the North Devon Branch Annual General Meeting at 2.00 on Sunday, 6<sup>th</sup> November, in the Castle Centre. Barnstaple. The present committee members are willing to serve for a further year but they need to be re-elected at the AGM. If you wish to join the committee, do let me know, as new members will be welcomed.

Our second event is the very sociable Skittles Evening in The Plough, Bickington, at 7.00 on Saturday, 26<sup>th</sup> November. If you have not already bought your tickets, please contact Barbara Carlyle.

The final event will be Mince Pie Tuesday at Horestone. The details will be sent out shortly. Following this Tuesday, the apiary will be closed until the Beginners Course starts in February...when beekeeping may resume again.

Very best wishes,

*Mave*

## 13<sup>th</sup> October, the first of our winter evening lectures – “The Romance of Beekeeping” Clare Densley

Clare Densley, Manager of the Bee Department at Buckfast Abbey, gave us a fascinating talk on ‘The Romance of Beekeeping’. She described her talk as a ramble through our relationship with the honeybee. It was very obvious that her relationship with the honeybee is more of a passion. She described Buckfast as being an amazing place and spoke of her trip to Pennsylvania last year, and how lucky she felt we were to keep bees in our beautiful countryside with all the hedgerows and forage between the fields.

Clare gave us an outline of the history of Buckfast, from a Cistercian Abbey from the 11<sup>th</sup> century till its dissolution in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Then in 1882 a group of Benedictine monks from Germany and France arrived and started to rebuild the Abbey and the Community. Br. Adam came from Germany in 1910, aged 11, and only speaking German. He became a aluminate which, from Clare’s description, was no easy life. Basically the children were recruited to work, either as stonemasons, in the kitchens, gardens or the apiary – in return for an education. Br Adams was an asthmatic so he was moved from stonemasonry work to the apiary – where he helped look after the 45 hives. It was during this time that the Isle of Wight disease decimated the colonies in England and the Abbey lost half of their colonies. The tracheal mite *Acarpis woodi*, was thought to have been the cause though nowadays it is thought to have been only part of the problem with other factors including chronic bee paralysis virus, lack of forage etc being involved as well. Br Adam always maintained it was Acarine. Br Adam took over the bee department and increased the number of colonies – he believed looking after the bees was his way of serving God. He directed his energies into trying to breed the perfect bee - a high quality bee, with all the characteristics that he wanted – a low swarming instinct, good mannered, resistant to disease, good honey producer. He was very methodical, bought in Italian bees which he crossed with the British black bee – the first nucs of Buckfast bees were produced. He was inspired by the work of Mendel and genetic inheritance – and spent a lot of time travelling, gathering breeding stock to improve his basic Buckfast bee. Clare described him as a complex character but thought that had they met they would have got on with their shared love of bees – though she herself thinks that there is no such thing as the perfect bee.

Clare talked about Buckfast as it is now, and her very different views on beekeeping. The Buckfast bee is a good commercial bee, but she finds the queens ‘too eggy’ – she mentioned that some of the last Buckfast bees bred at the Abbey in the 1980’s were very susceptible to AFB and there had been heavy losses. The bees kept at Buckfast now are Devon mongrels, which Clare believes is much healthier – too much inbreeding can damage the bees immune system. She said that isolation sites to restrict the drones the queens mate with is detrimental as it cuts down on the diversity of genes and causes inbreeding. The more promiscuous the queens are the better for the gene pool and the bees - colonies headed by a well mated queen

produce more pheromones, the communication and cohesion in the colonies is good – as is their gut bacteria and immune systems. The emphasis at Buckfast Abbey now is a more ‘bee friendly approach’ – monitoring the colonies and working with them – looking to find ways of making it easier for bees to live with us - instead of stressing them beyond their endurance and trying to make them comply to our wishes and needs. All the colonies at Buckfast are named, Kate, Rose etc - they have an individual management plan and are watched over by an enthusiastic team – the courses they run are aimed at a better understanding of these fascinating creatures. And the message within her talk - help the bees as opposed to using them unmercifully, include planting more forage, using less chemicals, and yes, maybe to really start to appreciate the hive as a superorganism with a secret language and a secret wisdom of its own. Bees do know what they are doing.

Clare’s talk has given us a lot to ponder over – a very successful start to our Winter Meetings.

Sylvie Barber



*Claire Densley with Peter Auger  
photo by Chris Utting*

**Editor’s Note:** If you missed Clare’s talk go to **YOU TUBE** - put in ‘Clare Densley’ to hear a 57 minute audio recording of the talk given to York County Beekeepers Association in Pennsylvania USA on 16 November 2015

## Chris Tozer

It was with great sadness that we learned of the death of Chris Tozer on 10<sup>th</sup> October. Chris has been a good friend to the North Devon Branch for many years. He first became a Branch member after attending one of Kay Thomas's Beginners classes

Chris was our Branch Chair in 2006 and 2007, then again in 2010 and 2011. He was Vice Chair on several occasions, and for many years the apiary gardener. Despite both Chris and Sue having a very busy life running their own bee products business, he found time to visit and help out at Horestone. Chris's interest in the world of beekeeping was well known, as was his knowledge of all aspects of the craft. He was always ready to pass on his knowledge of bees and Chris and Sue gave us several very enjoyable talks with demonstrations on cleaning wax and candle making. Chris was hardworking in support of the beekeeping community and our North Devon Branch. He will be greatly missed.

Sylvie Barber

# Honey offers a sweeter way to stop infections spreading

**Katie Gibbons**

It is normally spread on toast or stirred into tea to fight colds but manuka honey may soon find itself in hospitals as research shows that using it to coat medical implants could prevent infections.

Scientists at the University of Southampton found that the honey, which is known to heal cuts, boost immunity and improve skin conditions, could help keep internal devices such as urinary catheters disease-free.

The findings, published online in the *Journal of Clinical Pathology*, suggest that even low dilutions can curb the "stickiness" and growth of bacterial biofilms — a thin layer of microbes that build up on any surface, including plastic. The manuka honey was diluted with distilled water and added to a neutral medium at different strengths. A dilution of 3.3 per cent was found to reduce stickiness 35 per cent after 48

hours, compared with artificial honey, which is made of sugar or corn syrup. A dilution of 16.7 per cent reduced stickiness by 77 per cent after three days.

Bashir Lwaleed, who led the study, said: "We have been able to demonstrate that diluted honey is potentially a useful agent for reducing biofilm formation. Catheter infection rates can account for a large proportion of hospital acquired infections — it is an area of clinical practice that needs addressing.

Manuka honey is produced in Australia and New Zealand from the nectar of the manuka tree. Thick, dark brown and earthy-tasting, it has antiviral and antibacterial properties that can help to boost the immune system.

"We hope that these results may offer an alternative way of preventing infections," Associate Professor Lwaleed said. "Patients might also benefit from honey's anti-inflammatory properties, which are generally stronger in dark honeys."

*From THE TIMES 27.9.16*

Edited by Chris Utting e-mail [chrisutting@btinternet.com](mailto: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**