

NORTHERN LIGHTS

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



OCTOBER 2013

www.northdevonbees.org

Chair Chat

We've had very busy but very good month.

Our work day went very well everywhere looks very tidy. We hope to make use of all the apples this year and send them to be turned into apple juice for sale. We are busy feeding and getting the bees ready for winter; Chris Utting did all our Nosema tests and it looks as if our bees are going into winter nice and healthy.

We had our Honey Show at St John's Garden Centre in Barnstaple this month and although it's lots of hard work, it is also great fun. The entries were down this year, but the overall quality was up; the judges said we all did very well. I wish to thank Chrissie Preece for the smooth running of the show, only great organisation can get such good results. Also many thanks to all the volunteers that came and helped.

We will try and keep the Tuesday meetings going as long as the weather allows us to get there, and we are not flooded out. Please remember to park big cars in the field and if you can car share it will help.

Last year we didn't have to cancel until November, December and January. Martin will send an email round if we get flooded out - it is always best to check the emails on Tuesday morning before you set out.

There are lots of other cars and animals on the road to the apiary, please be very careful how you drive, keep your speed down and always give way to others if you can.

Barbara

Branch AGM

The AGM will be held at the Castle Centre, Barnstaple, at 2pm on Sunday 17th November. At this meeting the new committee will be elected and the administration positions filled. If you would like to be nominated for any position, please contact Barbara Carlyle or Martin Pollock as soon as possible.

Events 2013-14

Thurs 3 October	19.00 - 21.00	Talk 'Bees and Flowers' by Leila Goss, Castle Centre, Barnstaple
Sun 17 November	14:00 - 16:00	Branch AGM, Castle Centre, Barnstaple
Fri 29 November	19:00 onwards	Skittles Evening, The Plough Inn Bickington
Thurs 16 January	19.00 - 21.00	Talk 'Bee Bits' by Chris Utting, Castle Centre, Barnstaple
Thurs 13 February	19.00 - 21.00	Talk 'Nosema' by Glyn Davis, Castle Centre, Barnstaple
Thurs 13 March	19.00 - 21.00	Talk 'Predator Mites' by Richard Ball, Castle Centre, Barnstaple

Bee Quotes

'The men of experiment are like the ant, they only collect and use; the reasoners resemble spiders, who make cobwebs out of their own substance. But the bee takes the middle course, it gathers its material from the flowers of the garden and field, but transforms and digests it by a power of its own.'

Francis Bacon

Julie's Jottings

Sitting on a train to Paddington today as the sun emerges from the mist and the hedgerows are weighed down by fruit, seeds and nuts it is good to see Keats's Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness here in such abundance. Freezers are brimming full, the cupboards shelves stacked with jams, chutneys and bottled fruit giving that reassuring primitive sense of security that all is safely gathered in and we can survive the winter whatever it brings I even managed to snatch the *Rosa rugosa* hips from the beaks of the voracious blackbirds, I always leave some for them but they never extend the same courtesy to me! Hopefully our bees are enjoying the same sense of a full larder and will come through this coming season in better health than they did the last one.

This has made me contemplate the wider picture of our food production with television programmes about harvesting farm crops and now an article in the weekend paper about 'Franken Farms' as those opposed to them call them. In this case it was about Thanet Earth a vast greenhouse complex on the Isle of Thanet, one of them larger than 14 football pitches, the manager uses a bicycle to get around to check his crops, producing tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers all grown hydroponically on rock wool with not a crumb of soil in sight. You may have bought and eaten some of them from the supermarket. Plants are grown in optimum conditions of heat, light and humidity and fed a perfectly balanced diet to produce healthy plants that together with a strict code of hygiene aims to avoid or minimise the use of pesticides. This sounds an admirable policy as it also includes many energy saving, re-circulating techniques but I worry about the source of that perfect diet, how sustainable is that? Where do the hundreds of packages of bees come from (type not specified but presumably Bumble bees

for their 'buzz' pollination) and are they pest and disease free? Are there really so many mouths to feed that it cannot be done by using the land in a more sustainable way and encouraging people to eat more seasonally.

A little footsore after a day in London I am sitting at Paddington talking to the pest Control Officer and his hen harrier, a beautiful bird who makes rapid mincemeat of the pigeons who dare to come inside. His philosophy and order of attack was refreshing, use natural means first, then trapping, shooting and as a last resort poisons. He even eats a lot of his kills including grey squirrels which he assures me are delicious barbecued. Commendably sustainable and having identified the roosts of two pigeons he said they would be back later to deal with them.

Earlier in the day at the History of Gardening Museum the array of highly toxic chemicals available to gardeners and fruit growers in the early 1900s was terrifying. The slug killer 'ABDO' claimed to be non-arsenical; what it actually was I couldn't read but it assured the user it would wipe them all out instantly. Sadly, our response to most pests often still is to reach for the most potent killer available without thinking about the wider effects in the environment. However, I am encouraged that there are increasing numbers of people looking for a gentler alternative to the potions and lotions we use in our daily lives and it gives me a sense of satisfaction that even if my produce isn't flawless I never have to wash poisons off it before I eat it.

Don't forget the mouseguards when it is time to turn the central heating on and it's not time yet!

Julie

Member's Apiary: Christine Mottram in Combe Martin

My apiary is on a south facing slope behind our house in Combe Martin.

I was lucky enough to inherit three quarters of a shed left by the previous owners. By replacing the fourth side and including a window I not only have somewhere to store all my bits and pieces but also a safe place for visitors to observe the bees.

I levelled the ground in front of the shed to make enough space for about three hives. The perimeter was then planted with a willow "fedge". This separates the apiary from the rest of the garden and means that nobody strays unintentionally into the bees' area.

We bought the property in 2010 in order to grow trees and keep bees and my husband has kindly designated the area below the apiary for "bee trees" –

something to flower in each month of the year.

I lost two hives during the cold spring this year but now have two more. One is a swarm that I caught and put into my "bait hive". I had made up the hive with frames containing just 1" strips of foundation and the new bees have built their nest entirely from their own wax – even discarding the strips onto the hive floor! It is a beautiful, natural nest but easy to inspect as it has been built within the boundaries of the frames



Christine

Branch Honey Show



Show Secretary, Chrissie Preece with her stewards, Angus Basil and Martin Haddrill, next to the honey sales stall

Our annual Honey Show was held at St. John's Garden Centre on the 14th and 15th September and was a happy and successful show although our entry numbers were well down on last year. Congratulations to all of those people who entered their best efforts in honey, wax, mead, photography and cookery classes - everything was of a very high standard and our two judges had a very hard time picking winners!

Our judges this year were Mrs Sally Wilson for the cookery classes and Mrs Suzette Perkins for the honey, wax and all the rest of the classes. They were ably assisted by Martin Haddrill as the Cookery Judge's Steward and Angus Basil as the Honey Judge's Steward - many thanks go to them for their excellent assistance.

Trophies were awarded as follows: Branch Trophy - Derek

Hunter; Pam Yeo Jenn Trophy - Barbara Carlyle; Croyde Cup - Sylvia Barber; Hustwayte Plate - Chrissie Preece; Bernard Pritchard Novice Trophy - Cliff Davis; Chris Utting Novice Trophy - Mave Dowling; Beryl Smailes Rose Bowl - Chrissie Preece; and, the Pam Yeo Jenn Plaque - Bridget Simmonds.

The cups will be presented at this year's AGM on 17th November at the Castle Centre in Barnstaple. Another year of beekeeping draws to a close, much better weather than last year and let us hope that next year will be better still!

Chrissie



Judging the mead

The Horestone Workday on 10 September

The AST would like to thank all of you who came and worked so hard, the weather was kind to us and we achieved a great deal. I won't risk naming people in case I inadvertently leave anyone out but the creative ones helped the Show team pack up beautiful produce to sell at the Honey Show and we jobbing gardeners went outside.

The mowers and strimmers did a fantastic job, more difficult than usual as the brambles, old man's beard etc weren't hacked back last year due to the endless rain, some of us pruned, weeded, raked up, planted and a huge bonfire was coaxed into life. Yes we do compost all we can and only burn the heavyweight nasties! Horestone is looking so much better but like the Forth Bridge as soon you get to one end it's time to start again and there is never a shortage of work to keep us busy. The priorities now are to get the bees settled securely for winter, clean and scorch the contents of the 'coffin', render down the wax and clean up the frames. Now we have a freezer we will be putting all the good super comb in there.

The cakes were good too, not to mention all the fudge chimbles.

. . . with grateful thanks from the AST

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.