

TORBAY 'BUZZ' FOR FEBRUARY 2009.

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE TORBAY BRANCH, DBKA.

President : Mr. Ron Brown. OBE.

Web sites: southdevonbees.org & devonbeekeepers.co.uk

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY.

Tuesday, February 10th. The Gerston Christian Centre, off Torquay Rd., Paignton. Winter evening meeting commencing at 7-30 p.m..

Mr. Richard Ball presents 'The Foundation of Good Comb'.

Tuesday, March 10th. The Gerston Christian Centre, off Torquay Rd., Paignton. Winter evening meeting commencing at 7-30 p.m.

Mr. Kingsley Law presents 'The Coming Season'.

Saturday, March 28th. Cockington Apiary. Working party. Spring-cleaning of the apiary. Commencing at 10 a. m. All welcome. A 'fun' day!

Saturday, April 11th. Cockington Apiary. Commencing at 2-30 p.m. start of the summer Apiary programme. Ckecking all colonies, etc.

Saturday, April 18th. The Spring Convention at Stoneleigh, Warwickshire. Branch 'trip' using private cars. Co-ordinator: Jim Mogridge. Tele. 663308.

Tuesday, April 21st. Advance notice of a talk by Prof. Ellis at Kelly College, Tavistock. Details to follow in 'Beekeeping'

Saturday, April 25th. Cockington Apiary commencing at 2-30 p.m. Talking-over and agreeing the forthcoming Apiary summer programme.

THE CHAIRMAN'S CHAT.

I think the year has got off to a good start. We have had some enjoyable meetings at the Gerston Centre with the quiz night and Phil Chandlers fascinating talk on the top bar hives being very interesting. Some members thought that it was a step backwards to keep bees in this way and one could not do this for large numbers of hives. But it's a bit of fun and maybe well worth trying.

We have received some good publicity in the local papers with two large spreads on bee keeping. The reporter – Mike Baker – who came along to our last meeting was very impressed with all he saw and heard – luckily, we had a very good attendance that night!

At the Apiary, all colonies have been treated with oxalic acid for varroa control. We have seen quite a large drop of mites so I think we will treat the colonies with thymol again in the early spring and before honey starts flowing into our hives once more. This year is going to be good for bee keeping so look after your colonies and feed, if required. – candy now and syrup in March. See you all at the next meeting,

Jim

Mogridge.

BEEKEEPING IN FEBRUARY.

Jack's 'Notes' each month have been of invaluable help, I'm sure, to those of you who have taken up beekeeping in the last few years. I hope that those with even more extensive experience have taken a peek at them on occasions, at least. Unfortunately, Jack is away in the Caribbean at present, so I am standing-in for February.

Check that all is well.

If you put your bees into winter in good heart last autumn with plenty of stores, there is virtually nothing to be done in the apiary this month. I would recommend that you check that your hives have not been disturbed by wind, rain, rodents, woodpeckers or vandals. To check their stores, feel their weight by hefting the hives from both sides. On a still, warm day – say above 8° C and sunny - stand by the hive entrance about lunchtime and watch the bees taking cleansing flights, fetching in water and even, maybe, a little honey and pollen from laurustinus, hazel, snowdrops, aconite, celandine, and winter heathers. If the bees are not flying and you wonder whether the colony is still alive, put your ear close to the side of the hive and tap it (the hive, silly!) sharply. No need to bang it. You should hear a quiet murmur indicating that the bees are indeed alive and happy.

Dead bees on the alighting board.

A few bees will be dead on the alighting board. That is nothing to worry about. After a period of confinement, the bees are carrying out their dead. But, if there are large numbers you should consider whether they are suffering from disease. Soiling or spotting on the face of the could indicate nosema. Nothing much you can do at this stage but to remember it when you come to assess the colony in early April.

Feeding candy.

If the weather is warmish during the month, most colonies will be rearing a patch of brood; first on one and then on two combs in the very heart of the colony. Consequently, they will start to eat up their stores more quickly. At this time of year, as Jack has always stressed, they should be given candy **not** syrup. A plastic butter / Flora tub – or similar – is ideal. Fill with candy and invert over the feed hole so that about half is exposed to the bees. See the bee books for how to make candy or else buy it from your local bakery. Ask for 'bakers fondant' only and ensure that it contains no additives. Check two weeks later. If it is all gone, the bees need some more. If not, then either they do not need it or the colony is too weak.

Kingsley Law

BEEES CAN COUNT? WELL, SORT OF!

The honey bee can tell the difference between different numbers at a glance, scientists said today. Evidence of numeracy among insects emerged after

scientists found bees can discriminate between patterns containing two and three dots – without having to count them. Researchers based in Australia also claim that, with training, bees can learn to tell the difference between three and four. In the study, the bees flew through an entry of a Y-maze marked with a pattern of either two or three dots, which were signposts to the reward. They then had to choose between two patterns by correctly matching the number of dots, to find where the reward was.

Honeybees Numeracy WMN. Jan 28th. 09

THREE MEN & A BEEHIVE.

We were to meet at Cockington Apiary at 10-30 a.m. By 10-45 the last two arrived! There were Gaffer, Goffer and Deafy. We had to treat the rest of the hives which we had left a bit late due to the weather over Christmas. But now was the time, with the weather over 9° C. So one of us took off the roof and crown board and puffed in a little smoke. The next person did the treatment and the last person put the hive back together again. We had lost one nuc. starved out and one of our main colonies had just a handful of bees remaining. So we took off the honey to stop any robbing.

Next, it was off to Netherton where Jim had taken over the bottom of a friend's garden. The chap had better be careful or Jim will be on the main lawn next! Some of the hives needed candy. It seems that most of the hives are very strong with a lot of that ivy stuff.

Then it was on to Denbury – John's apiary. You have to be very careful going into John's field. It can get very wet by the entrance gate – up to the second bar of the gate when it is very wet. It was Jim's car so it was dry enough anyway and so up to the apiary we drove. You then have to be very careful as you don't know what is in the long grass! Some of John's hives needed candy so, John, if you are reading this and have not yet put the candy on, 'Poor bees!'. Now off to John's 'second home' just across the village green. We met a nice chap, one of our ex-members. He's joined Newton Abbot Branch but after many words with him he should be put off Newton Abbot Branch for life! (joking, honest) One and a half hours later I had to carry Gaffer and Goffer out as they can't handle it, you know. By now it was dark but it has been said 'you can't have a better day than messing around with bees'.

Deafy (members may guess who this miscreant is!)

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION & BEE INSURANCE.

A gentle reminder that our DBKA 'subs' were due from January 1st. Our Treasurer tells me that more than twenty members have paid up but that leaves quite a few members who have yet to get around to this financially painful task. If it helps ease the pain, our Chairman has assured us of bumper honey crops for the forthcoming season. (there will be a government-funded compensation scheme to

reimburse members if this promise goes bottom-up!!) Need advice on Gift Aid, Bee Disease Insurance or membership category? Give Kingsley a call on 01803 812285.

SCRIBE NEEDED.

Our Apiary Management Team, in line with best bee keeping practice, maintains an up-to-date record of each Cockington Apiary colony. However, in the hurly-burly of a busy summer's afternoon, manipulating, demonstrating and answering onlookers questions, record-keeping can sometimes take a second place. The team is looking for a volunteer from among our 'regulars' at the Apiary to take on the task of accompanying the 'Team' and maintaining accurate colony records. This is an interesting job and one which teaches its 'owner' a great deal of bee keeping technique in a short time. Please speak to Jim on 01803 663308 or John on 01803 325592

YOUR BRANCH COMMITTEE 2008 / 9.

At our AGM in November 2008 the following Officers and committee members were elected: office.

Officers:

Chairman, Mr. Jim Mogridge, (Apiary Management Team)

vice Chairman, Mr. Maurice Satterly,

Treasurer, Mr. Kingsley Law,

Secretary, Mr. Douglas Westaway. (vice President)

Committee Members:

Mrs. Wendy Ashley, (Literature Distribution) Mrs. Margaret Davey, (Auditor), Mr. Ron Brown, (President), Mr. Jack Berry, (Training Officer), Mr. John Vyle, (Apiary Management Team), Mr. Les Williams, Mr. Steve Westcott, Mr. Neil Hopkins.

The various Branch responsibilities detailed in brackets are allocated within committee and not subject to a vote at the AGM.

Doug Westaway (Hon. Secretary)

WINTER MEETINGS.

At the January winter meeting there was an excellent turn-out of members to hear Phil Chandler explain the background history of a variety of top-bar hives designs. Phil also showed his illustrations of a modern, practical and economical design of a 'top-bar' hive which would be easy for average 'do-it-yourselfers' to make up for themselves. Phil made a strong case for a more down-to-earth and economical approach to bee keeping which works with the natural instincts of the bees rather than forcing them into the human constraints of the frame hive. Phil's web site is www.biobees.com. from whence you can purchase Phil's book and learn all about top bar hives, their operation and construction. Go for it!

On February 10th, we have our old friend, Mr. Richard Ball, National Bee Inspector, travelling from Sidmouth to give us the benefit of his vast experience. On this visit he will be explaining to us the key importance of creating and maintaining first-class

honeycomb within the hive. Come along, learn how!
Doug Westawy 01803 325750