

TORBAY 'BUZZ' FOR APRIL 2009.

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE TORBAY BRANCH, DBKA.

President : Mr. Ron Brown. OBE.

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

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY.

Saturday, April 11th. Cockington Apiary.

Commencing at 2-30 p.m. start of the summer Apiary programme. Checking 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.

Sunday, May 17th. Central Garage, Newton Rd., Torquay. Commencing at 10 a.m. Loading lorry with Devon County Show equipment hat)

Sunday, May 24th. Central Garage, Newton Rd., Torquay. Unloading lorry with County Show equipment.

Thursday, Friday & Sunday 21st, 22nd & 23rd. May. The Devon County Show.

Saturday, 6th June. Cockington Apiary. Commencing at 2-30 p.m. Visit by Plymouth Branch members plus a Branch barbecue.

Saturday, 20th June. Cockington Apiary. Visit to the Branch Apiary by our Regional Bee Inspector, Mr. Adam Vevers..

THE COUNTY SHOW.

As reported in the March 'Buzz', Torbay Branch has volunteered to be responsible for the candle-rolling and honey-tasting stands at this year's Devon County Show. Wendy Ashley tells me that three Branch members have very kindly volunteered to help out. A big 'thank you' to you all. However, Wendy urgently needs more stewards to help on the Friday and Saturday of the Show. Can anyone help out? PLEASE! The dates are Friday 22nd May and Saturday 23rd. May morning or afternoons. Wendy Ashley will be organising the stands and will provide any necessary training. The only requirement is a happy smile! This is always a busy 'fun day' with lots of jolly laughter. The lucky volunteers will need to put in half a day – morning or afternoon - on a stand and will then have the rest of the day free to enjoy the County Show. Your reward? Free entry to the County Show and the satisfaction of a worthwhile job well done.

Call Wendy NOW on 01803 851552.

JACK'S 'TOPICAL TIPS'.

At last we have spring! It is amazing how it suddenly came but we must remember that we could still have a cold snap at any time. Our bees will be getting excited now and will be breeding nicely, we hope. We can, on a warm day, have a quick look in our hives but don't keep them open too long as the brood nest will take a long time reach 94° F. All you really want to know is whether the queen is laying well, or not. If the colony needs feeding you can now use syrup.

About the middle of April you should, if the weather is OK, be able to open your hives for a longer period without risking chilling the brood.. Then floors can be cleaned, the brood examined both for disease and to make sure that the queen is laying a nice brood pattern. If she isn't laying then look to see why. Is she old? Damaged? Poorly mated? Should the colony be joined to another? If you remember, last summer was a very bad one and there were many swarms which meant that new queens may not have been mated properly and so will have become drone laying queens. You will see that the cappings on the worker cells are highly domed. Kill the queen and unite with another queen-right colony. You will then be able to make a split later in the year to replace your loss.

Assuming that all is well, as soon as your colony becomes large enough – say 7 or 8 frames of brood – put on your first super as this will give more room for the queen to lay and, hopefully, not swarm.

All the best for the coming season which, I feel, will be a bumper year.

Jack Berry.

THE PLIGHT OF THE BUMBLEBEE.

There are many species of bumblebees as well as of honey bees. In the bounteous days of teeming hedgerows and field of clover, Britain had 25 kinds of bumblebee all gathering nectar and pollinating plants and trees. Three of these have already vanished, and seven more are in the Government's Biodiversity Action Plan as priorities for salvation. It is the same across Europe and the reasons, everywhere, are the same. – changes in agricultural practices that have replaced historic mixed farmscapes with heavily industrialised monocultures in which wild animals and plants are unwelcome. Insects, in particular, have been the targets of intense chemical warfare. We are, at the eleventh hour, learning from our mistakes but patching nature back together again is far more difficult than blowing it apart. Following the multiple crises affecting honey bees – foulbrood, varroa mites, viral diseases dysfunctional immune systems and CCD, most people have now got the point about honey bees and it is understood that the true value of Apis

mellifera lies not so much in the sticky stuff that gives our favourite insect its name as in the service it provides as a pollinator of farms and gardens. It is an equation of stark simplicity. No pollination: no crops. The US has lost 70% of its honeybee colonies over the past two winters. Losses in the UK are running at 30% - up from just 6% in 2003.

Fewer people realise that the bumblebees, too, are important. Growers of beans, oilseed rape and fruit especially have reason to feel alarmed at their disappearance. So vital are they to the productivity of the fields that farmers are having to import captive-bred reinforcements, many of them southern-European species raised in Slovakia. The total annual influx is reckoned at some 100,000 nests, each containing a queen and 200 workers, priced around £50 a time. As the example of the honey bee shows, this is a strategy of incalculable risk. International trade in honey bees has spread pests and diseases that imminently threaten their survival. For bumblebees, too, time is running out, and nobody knows whether the introduction of alien species will delay the end or bring it closer. The signs are not encouraging. In the US, wild bumblebee numbers have collapsed dramatically since the 1990s. – they have been killed by parasites carried by European species brought in to pollinate greenhouse crops such as tomatoes and peppers. Nor is disease the only risk. There is also the ‘grey squirrel effect’ in which native species are driven out by more aggressive foreigners. This has happened in Japan where imports of *Bombus terrestris* – a native of southern England – have escaped and are now out-breeding the locals. The aliens are better foragers and breed more rapidly than the natives, whose health and territory they threaten, while there is no guarantee that the immigrants themselves will not be poleaxed by local infections. In the complex world of inter-species relationships developed over millennia, small changes can have massive effects.

The warming climate – harbinger of all-year summers – will not set the hedgerows buzzing. Bumblebees evolved in the Himalayas and are unusual among insects in not liking warm weather. Their thick fur coat is an aid to survival in a cool climate but an energy-sapping body broiler in the heat which is why the southern hemisphere has no bumblebees. Once, the great yellow bumblebee, *bombus distinguendus*, which thrives in the cold and wet, was common throughout Britain. Now it has been driven so far northward that it occurs on the mainland only within half a mile of the coast of Caithness and Sutherland and is probably doomed as a result of climate change.

The shrill carder bee, *bombus sylvarum* is now limited to the Somerset Levels, Salisbury Plain and the Thames Estuary. Since 1980, the formerly common large garden bumblebee, *Bombus ruderatus* has been recorded at fewer than ten sites in the UK. As the insect world is forced inexorably northwards, it may be hoped that other pollinators from southern Europe may move into the vacuum behind them. However, bumblebees are not like migrating birds - they do not fly for hundreds of miles between habitats. They need continuous corridors of suitable habitats to move through. Without a link through to France, they are more likely to die out where they are. If new species did arrive, they would be unable to take on all of the work of the old. Many bumblebees are specialist feeders that depend upon particular group of plants. Some species have developed long tongues with which they can reach the nectar of deep-throated flowers. Without them, the flowers could not reproduce. The first casualties of a native bumblebee exodus would be some of the best-loved British wild flowers such as foxgloves, irises, red clover, comfrey, toadflax and tufted vetch. Soft fruit, oilseed rape and bean crops would also take a hit.

Beyond inclusion in the Biodiversity Action Plan, where bumblebees are just seven among 1149 species ranging from mosses to whales, the government offers no direct funding for their protection. Artificial fertilisers mean there is no need for the old-fashioned rotation of crops including, most importantly, the clover that they used to forage on and herbicides have eliminated most of the wild alternatives. Nesting sites have gone too. Some species live in dense grass above ground; others prefer underground cavities - typically, abandoned rodents’ nests. The removal of hedgerows and unploughed field margins has directly put paid to the upstairs bees and, indirectly to the downstairs ones by starving-out the voles and mice that create their homes. Many surviving populations of bumblebees are small and isolated, resulting in inbreeding which weakens the gene pool and increases the threat of extinction. In the US and Canada the Small Hive Beetle which has already devastated tens of thousands of honeybee colonies has spread into the bumblebee population along with deformed Wing Virus. The Small Hive Beetle has not yet reached the UK but it has reached other parts of Europe and its transmission here via imported bees is a matter of ‘when, not ‘if’. Good news? Only a little. Government subsidies are available to farmers who replant hedgerows and restore grassland or sow wildflower strips. Bumblebees will get some benefit. Unfortunately, bumblebees cannot be conserved by managing small protected islands of habitat set within a sea of intensively farmed land. Large areas of suitable habitat are needed to support viable populations in the long term. *Extract from Sunday Times Magazine, Feb. 09. Author Richard Girling.*

See: www.bumblebeeconservationtrusy.co.uk

STONELEIGH SPRING CONVENTION.

Saturday, April 18th. The event which ‘kicks-off’ the new season. Make the effort and **GO!** Call Jim on 663308

