



January 2009

Wishing you

A HAPPY NEW YEAR

Meetings: we start 2009 with our Annual Dinner on **January 15** at the Church House Inn, Rattery. We gather from 7.00pm for a 7.30 start to the meal. This is a very old, picturesque pub dating from 1028, with a good reputation so we expect to have a pleasant evening. Do feel free to bring along partners or friends to join us. There is a varied menu from which to choose whatever takes your fancy.

Directions: The pub is next to the church at the southern end of Rattery, the map reference is SX741 615. If you are using a sat nav to guide you then the postcode is TQ10 9LD. If you are coming from the Totnes area then take the A385 towards Marley Head and turn right under the viaduct close to Edeswell farm, stay on this lane until you reach the pub. If you are coming along the A38 then the easiest route is to turn onto the A385 at Marley Head then turn left under the viaduct and again stay on this lane until you arrive.

On **February 25** Phil Chandler will talk about top-bar hives and the thinking which brought him to use them.

On **March 13** we will have an update on varroa and available treatments for this continuing pest.

On Saturday, **March 21** Adam Vevers is arranging a Nosema day for us and other south Devon branches.

Details later but please put these dates into your new diary now.

Last Month

We had a fascinating evening at the Honey Challenge with Stephen Ide judging, and I was very pleased when Rachel West, a member of our winter bee class, agreed to write about her impression of the occasion.

The Honey Show

10th December 2008

As a complete bee novice, currently attending the bee-keeping evening classes, David & I thought that it would be interesting to go to The Honey Show, especially with the prospect of honey tasting on offer! We arrived to find an array of impressive-looking trophies and jars of honey and examples of beeswax lined up in rows beneath. It all looked very professional.

We sat in a line opposite the exhibits and the judging got underway. The judge, evidently a regular official at the Devon Show, undertook his role with a mixture of gravity and humour, with a view to ensuring high standards and passing on as much information to his audience, so that we understood that those gaining a true first prize had to achieve a level that might be good enough to win at the county show. He told us what he looked for in a jar of honey, from possible specks of propolis, to evidence of froth on top, down to flaws in the glass jars and the positioning of labels. He gave tips on how to try and overcome these problems, including not using a dishwasher to wash the jars

and taking extra care on filtration. Not only that, we all got to test the viscosity of the honey, to sniff the honey and see the tiny amount of froth on top of a jar that caused its down-grading. There was no tasting for us at that point though. Meanwhile the judge fascinated us by using a glass rod to take a sample from each jar and place the honey on the back of his hand from where he ate it!

It wasn't all about honey though. There were beautiful blocks of wax, some presented in very smart boxes, which again were handed around for us to sniff and appreciate. There was one bottle of mead which was passed tantalisingly under all of our noses – sadly only the judge got to taste it! There was honey fudge and honey flapjacks, which later we did all get to taste, and very good they were too. Finally, there was the photographic class, with all sorts of interesting entries, but the outright winner was of an excellent close-up of a bee on a clover flower. It was an excellent and informative evening, that gave us the opportunity to talk to beekeepers with years of experience and to see standards that we might aspire to one day. Oh, and we did get to taste some honey, not that from the exhibits, but some jars from around the world that were available at coffee time. My favourite was Thyme flower honey that was from Greece I think.

Rachel West

Letter from America to Jeremy from Sam

The weather here has turned unseasonably cold. Sunday December 7, the temperature was in the high teens and lower 20s but with the brisk wind, the wind chill brought it down to about zero. I went to the bee yard and added more weights to the roofs to ensure they did not blow off.

I finished wrapping my hives on Saturday, December 6. I use #15 weight black roofing paper for the wrapping. I only wrap the top half of the hive as by the time the wrapping is of use the colony will have eaten it's way out of the bottom super and up into the top supers. They always cluster in the late fall in the bottom-most super and consume the stores there first and then move into the upper boxes. The purpose of the wrapping is not for insulation though that is a consideration, it is for those January and February days that the temperature is very cold (zero or below) but there is sunshine. The sun warms the black paper causing the inside of the colony to heat up and the bees if necessary (and it usually is) can break cluster and move to stores. Otherwise they will remain clustered and starve. It is very frustrating to open a dead-out hive in the spring that has starved and it had more than sufficient stores but the bees could not move to them. When the weather remains extremely cold for a prolonged period (2 days or more) they will not break cluster as the queen

will very likely die. The few increased degrees that the black paper provides will save a colony.

I'm going into the winter with 32 colonies and 5 nucs. I believe I mentioned to you that we are experimenting with different ways that we can keep nucs over the winter to replace winter dead outs in the spring without having to rely on bees from the south, which now may have Africanized genes.

The 5 nucs are divided into 3 experiments. There are 2 four-frame nucs in a 10 frame super separated by a specially designed home made division board feeder which feeds both nucs but prevents communication between the two colonies. This nuc we have placed on top of a strong colony so that some of the heat will pass up into the nuc. I have tried this once before and one side died and the other flourished. This year I have modified the feeder.

In addition, there are 2 standard 5-frame nucs that we have added a 5 frame deep honey super on top. These 2 nucs we have placed side by side with the sides touching with the entrances facing east and wrapped them together to hopefully draw heat from each other. We have not tried this before.

I envy you your warmer weather but not the mildew that accompanies it.

Sam

Off the Comb

Could you write something for this Newsletter?

Southdevonbees.org

If you have internet access, at home or through your local library then you will find interesting things on this site; many thanks to Phil Chandler for looking after it.

Library books and videos

Do you have anything out on loan from the branch library? If you do have then please return it soon to Phil Chandler, tel.07988 739075.

An extension can be arranged, but please do so through Phil.

Needing help?

Our branch has two Master Beekeepers and Ken holds the highest UK bee-keeping qualification, the National Diploma in Beekeeping, so if you feel the need of some instant advice then you can telephone with a good chance of getting through to one of us. If you need help then phone one of:

Ken Basterfield NDB 01404 815885

Brian Gant 01364 642233

If you have a brood disease problem then phone our Regional Bee Inspector
Adam Vevers 01364 653325

Branch contacts:

Web site for news of meetings in south Devon, and many other matters
southdevonbees.org

Chairman: Jeremy Wells 01364 72180,
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Secretary: Adrian Kyte, 01803 712159, adrian.kyte@btinternet.com

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Off the Comb, and Education: Brian Gant 01364 642233,
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