



February 2009

**Meetings:** our main meeting this month is on **Wednesday, February 25.** at 7.30pm.

*'Top Bar Hives: are they a viable alternative in Britain?'*

Phil Chandler will talk about how and why he came to use top bar hives, and show how he manages them through the beekeeping season.

The meeting is at Birdwood House in the centre of Totnes.

Top bar hives have a very simple construction which gives some advantages and some disadvantages, many members will have seen Phil's hives at Riverford on summer meetings there, come along to find out more and look for implications for your own style of keeping bees.

**Directions:** Birdwood house is in Totnes High Street next to the Civic Square, we will be in a meeting room on the first floor. Park in any of the car parks at the top of the town, note that South Hams charges for evening parking.

On **February 28** Holsworthy branch have an all-day meeting to which we are invited. Details are at [www.holsworthybeekeepers.org.uk](http://www.holsworthybeekeepers.org.uk), there is an advertisement in January BEEKEEPING, and possibly in February too. Brian intends to be there and Phil Chandler is speaking so it should be possible to share transport. They have a good programme and charge only £10 including lunch etc.

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

**March 14** is DBKA President's Day, details in BEEKEEPING.

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

**April 17, 18 and 19** is the BBKA Spring Convention at Stoneleigh.

**April 25** will be the first open day at our branch apiary

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

## **Feeding fondant to bees**

We are now coming into a critical time for our bees as the old winter bees come to the end of their lives and the number of young to be fed increase ready for the active season.

The heavier than usual losses in the last few winters suggest that emergency feeding may be needed soon. So do check the weight of your hives and if any feel light it is safer to feed them. I am feeding fondant to three stocks at the end of January.

While the weather is cold bees will not leave the cluster to go up into a feeder so they need to be fed with Bakers' Fondant which can be placed close to them, or you can make your own fondant.

Bakers' Fondant is familiar as the white icing layer on sticky buns, its main ingredient is sugar. It comes in large packs (about 7kg I think) and is best scooped into empty margarine boxes with a half-inch hole in the lid. The box is then placed upside down on the top bars so the bees have easy access (do put the hole over a gap between the bars).

The pack is large so you might share it with another member or put it all into margarine boxes and keep it in the freezer until needed - I am now using some bought in 2005.

You can order it from your local baker or, I am told, you can buy

ready-made icing from supermarkets, this should be similar.

## **Thanks from the Treasurer**

John Harler thanks all members who have sent in their 2009 membership form promptly, this makes his job much easier. So if this note troubles your conscience then please do something about it now. If you are unsure which grade of membership suits you then ask one of the committee for advice.

## **A move to Sharpham?**

When we moved the branch apiary to its present site with the help of Dartington Tech, we expected to have the use of a meeting room, WCs and a kitchen area; then Dartington Tech went into liquidation and we were left with just the apiary site. Recently a few of us went to visit the Sharpham trust, alongside the Dart and south-east of Totnes. We were made welcome and they would like to have our bees on their land, and they have the facilities which we could use. Discussions continue since there may be a problem with the need to spray the grapevines nearby. Watch this space for developments.

Present plans are that if we do move the apiary to Sharpham we will retain the site at Dartington for use by members, and for queen mating etc.

## **Easi-Steam**

This is available for loan to members and makes it easy to melt down old combs to recover the beeswax. Just ask Rod or Brian.

## **Beekeeping exams**

If you know it all you can prove it by passing the BBKA exams, if you don't then preparing for these assessments will improve your knowledge and your beekeeping.

We have some members preparing to take the Basic early this season, contact Brian if you would like to know more about joining them.

If you are intending to take any of the modules then your entry has to be with Roger Lacey by February 10, so do it now.

## **Straining wax and honey**

At our honey show last December the judge noted that some exhibits showed dark specks, probably propolis, even if you are not entering honey for show these are unsightly, most can be removed by proper straining.

For honey the best straining material is woven from mono-filament nylon since this does not shed fibres into the honey as natural materials may do. A commonly used material has the weave spaced at 200  $\mu$ m (i.e. 0.2mm).

I find it convenient to use this with the common double strainer with the nylon cloth held between the two strainers. The coarse strainer takes out the larger debris and the nylon collects the finer particles.

For rough straining beeswax almost any cloth will do quite well, I often use curtain lining. But if you are entering wax for show it needs to be done rather more carefully and for this I find that the best material is the

filter paper which is sold for use in deep-fat fryers.

Use a wire coathanger and re-shape it to make a circular frame with a handle and a couple of protuberances so that it will rest on an old saucepan or a Pyrex bowl. Fit the filter paper over the frame and fix it in place, I use staples for this. And you will then get nice clean wax with fewer impurities to spoil your exhibit.

## **Gloves in the apiary?**

It is my view that, as a general practice, bees in our branch apiary should be so well behaved that we do not get stung most of the time. And an occasional sting is not a problem and may even be beneficial.

But you should always have stout gloves available in case the bees are having a bad day.

However, in some apiaries it is becoming quite the fashion to issue thin medical gloves and to expect them to be worn "for the sake of hygiene". These certainly keep the propolis off the fingers and make it possible to wash the hive tool etc in a solution of washing soda between hives. But without gloves one can still clean the tool, and fingers, in water while avoiding the sweaty fingers which come from wearing gloves, even thin ones, on hot days. What do you think we should do in 2009?

### **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.

## **Apiary Site**

Ken has passed on details of a possible apiary site in Abbotskerswell. The owner has an orchard and would like someone to keep bees there. Brian has the details if you would like them.

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## **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,  
ena@jeremywells.entadsl.com

Secretary: Adrian Kyte, 01803 712159, adrian.kyte@btinternet.com

Treasurer: John Harler 01364 642517, fire221@btinternet.com

Off the Comb, and Education: Brian Gant 01364 642233,  
brian.gant@which.net

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