



March 2009

**Meetings:** our main meeting this month is on **Friday, March 13.** at 7.30pm. at Bogan House, Totnes High Street.

Brian Gant will lead a discussion on the various varroa treatments now available, including ways of using organic acids etc, and some things which you should not be using.

**Directions:** Bogan House is in Totnes High Street opposite the Civic Square. Park in any of the car parks at the top of the town, note that South Hams charges for evening parking. This is a new venue for us, I understand that it is one of the older buildings in the town and worth seeing.

**March 14** is DBKA President's Day, details in BEEKEEPING. The meeting includes a talk by Tim Lovett, BBKA Chairman, and an auction of bee goods. A good opportunity to sell things which you are not using and also to buy equipment.

On Saturday, **March 21** DBKA and DARG are arranging a Nosema day for us and other south Devon branches. Again details are in BEEKEEPING. Please note that this is not a meeting, it is an opportunity to have a sample of your bees tested for nosema. For our branch this service is provided, at any time, by David Shingleton but it is worth making an effort to get your bees checked. Now that we have a new form of nosema present in the UK, about which we know very little, nosema checking is particularly important.

**April 17, 18 and 19** is the BBKA Spring Convention at Stoneleigh. On the Saturday you will find many trade stands and a great variety of bee things for sale at competitive prices. It takes about 3 hours to drive there from south Devon so it is possible to get there and back in a day, sharing the driving if at all possible, but much more convenient to stay overnight somewhere nearby.

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

## **Summer meetings**

In May we meet to see Jeremy's bees.

On June 6 we will be at the branch apiary with Adam Vevers to get the latest information on Small Hive Beetle, this will include examples of the traps which the NBU have been developing.

In July (date to be confirmed) we will meet Phil Chandler at Riverford Farm to see his bees in their top-bar hives, and to enjoy a cream tea.

In August we expect to visit the bees at the heather.

More details of these meetings will be in Off the Comb each month, and we expect to add a few more, so if you would like to host a meeting then please contact Brian.

## **Last month**

A big crowd of us, including several newcomers, met at the end of the month to hear Phil Chandler talk about top-bar hives. Phil started with a quick review of other people's variations on the theme; one which caught my eye had semi-circular top-bars which fitted into a very unusual egg-shaped hive, possibly not very practical but very attractive.

Phil then described how he has been using, and developing the concept in recent years before answering many questions.

It was interesting to see that there is quite a lot of interest in Phil's philosophy of keeping a few stocks in simple hives for the sake of the

bees, and presumably the pollination, with only a limited demand for honey which is obtained by crushing the combs without the use of the usual extractor.

A good evening and one of our best attended meetings.

## **Nosema Day**

Don't forget to take a sample of 30 bees from each hive to Southpark on March 21.

## **Branch apiary**

At the end of February all of the bees seemed to have come through the winter safely, though it is too early to do a proper inspection.

One of the Nationals is rather light so is being fed with syrup, and they are taking it down. The Langstroth nuc has been taking fondant very slowly for the last month but seems fine.

We have also established an extension area where members can put hives for a short time while queens get mated or to change apiary positions. It now looks as though the move to Sharpham will not take place since on closer consideration there are some disadvantages for the bees although the facilities for the beekeepers are attractive.

## **Losses survey**

Again this year DBKA are carrying out a survey of winter losses so, probably next month, some members will get a phone call asking how their bees have survived the winter. This year we will also be asking about any losses last summer.

## Taking the Basic

If you have kept bees for a little while you should have no difficulty in passing the BBKA Basic assessment. You will be asked to light a smoker and open a hive while explaining what you are doing and pointing out the various things seen. It is worth meeting others for a practice run first, if you have slipped into bad habits this is an opportunity to put them right.

The second part is to answer questions about aspects of beekeeping not covered in the first part, for instance how you deal with a hive which has started making queen cells, or how you take a swarm on a post. Some of these you will be able to answer from your experience, some will have to be book-knowledge.

The part which causes most difficulty is the important topic of bee diseases. Most of us have little or no familiarity with these, especially the foul broods. But it is important that you know enough about them to be sure of recognising the problem and that you know what needs to be done. I find that there is much confusion about dysentery and nosema, so let's clear up that topic.

Dysentery is shown in the winter or early spring by brown faecal stains on the front of the hive or on the combs inside. It is caused by the bees having an overfull rectum and not being able to fly outside to empty it in the usual way. The problem may be caused by eating unsuitable

winter feed. It may also be caused by nosema.

Nosema is a disease spread by spores which lie dormant until they are taken in by a bee perhaps as it cleans up in the hive. In the bee stomach the spores develop and attack the cells lining the stomach wall where they are able to reproduce. This prevents the bee from being able to digest pollen which then collects in the rectum possibly leading to dysentery.

Young bees need the protein in pollen for their own bodies and also to produce the brood food which they feed to the larvae. Thus severely infected stocks will have difficulty in raising young bees in the spring and will not develop normally, indeed they may well dwindle away to collapse.

You can avoid nosema by feeding only pure sugar for the winter feed, by replacing brood combs often and by keeping the inside of the hive clean. Any brood combs being recycled should be disinfected with acetic acid vapour before reuse. There is also a suggestion that adding a little thymol to the autumn feed is helpful.

Having dealt with that topic, back to the Basic: almost everyone taking the test passes, so if you have not taken it yet do some reading and talk to Brian so that you can join the group of members taking it this spring.

## **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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