



April 2009

Meetings: Summer has arrived at last. So our main meeting this month is the opening of the branch apiary at Dartington at 2.00pm on **April 25**. There may be some routine inspections but, weather permitting, there will be other things to see too. If there is something you would be pleased to see then do contact our Apiary Manager, Rod Saffery, (see back page for contact details). There is more on our apiary inside. After the bekeeping those with time to chat will probably adjourn for tea and cake nearby.

Directions: the apiary is close to Foxhole on the Dartington Trust Estate, turn into the entrance to Foxhole and immediately take the narrow, unmade track on the left of the drive, this leads to a car parking area where we will meet.

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. Next month we meet to see Jeremy's bees near South Brent on **May 10** and on **June 6** we will be back at the branch apiary for an update by our Regional Bee Inspector on the Small Hive Beetle, In July we will be at Riverford Farm to see Phil's bees in their top-bar hives.

Those are the main items in our summer programme, alongside those the members of the beginners classes will be practicing their beekeeping skills, and some members will be preparing to take off their "L-plates" by passing the BBKA Basic assessment. We are also starting a new beginners course this month and they will be using the apiary too.

We have room for some extra general meetings too, do contact Brian if you would like to welcome members to see how you keep your bees.

Last month

Varroa treatments was the topic, led by me, I will write this note in the third person since these are my views.

Brian started with the all too familiar strips, Apistan and Bayvarol, which we have been encouraged to use. Varroa is now resistant to these, but more importantly, we now know that these pyrethroids accumulate in the wax and damage developing drones and probably queens. This may well explain the recently reported queen problems. Brian hoped that members would not go back to using these strips. Apiguard is based on thymol and often works well, but not always, so a check is needed after use. Tests of thymol in New Zealand showed much variation though often very effective. Tests in Italy found Apiguard more effective if a deeper eke is used, so Brian now makes these from 3 inch timber. To avoid the mistakes of the past we need to use an approach using Integrated Pest Management, but this needs alternative treatments. The Veterinary Medicines Directorate is responsible for checking animal treatments, but can only do so when a manufacturer has carried out suitable tests. This will not be done for the organic acids because there is no profit to be made from these substances which are readily available. So the VMD has said that it will not prosecute responsible beekeeper users.

Brian then described the methods of using formic and lactic acids in the summer and oxalic acid in the winter, based on trials carried out in other countries; we need UK tests too, and on a larger scale than his tests.

Dusting the bees with icing sugar is also possible and seems helpful in the summer months though tests and opinions vary.

Treating varroa while keeping our honey pure and our bees healthy is our main problem now.

I hope we will see methods demonstrated in our branch apiary where they are working well at present.

Branch apiary

All colonies have come through the winter, even Brian's two frame Langstroth nuc. And all showing very low levels of varroa thanks to the Apiguard treatment at the end of last summer which in some cases was followed by formic acid treatment. Bee samples were taken to the recent DBKA/DARG Nosema Day and found only very levels in a couple of hives although they have had no nosema treatment for many years, if ever; probably a tribute to the good-hygiene practices which we follow.

County Show stewards needed

Can you help at any time in May 21 to 23? Stewards are needed for half a day, or more, in the Bees & Honey marquee.

Adrian has the details.

Opening a hive

This note is directed at members preparing to take the BBKA Basic soon, it should also be of interest to other members.

Get your smoker going well first then put on your veil. It is usual to puff a little smoke in the entrance, if guard bees are on duty then the smoke will mask their alarm pheromone, only a little smoke is needed for this.

To see eggs you need a good light behind you so try to stand with the sunlight coming over your shoulders. Lift off the roof and put it upside down and to one side, then lift one side of one or more supers, I often use a wedge to hold them while I blow some smoke in and free any frames which are attached by burr comb to the frame above. Now these supers are free lift them clear and take a step sideways to put them on the roof - do this without twisting yourself, to save your back. If there are more supers to remove then raise the crownboard and give a little smoke before putting it on the next super.

Blow some smoke through the queen excluder to clear the top-bars and lift the QX, check that the queen is not on it and lean it against one of the hive front corners. If bees are gathering by the entrance give them a little smoke.

Now take out the dummy board, check it for the queen and lean it against the hive or QX. This should give an adequate working space, if not then take out the first frame,

this can be checked and placed with the dummy board, if there are many bees on the frame then it is a good move to put both into a nuc box.

Now, if right-handed, hold the hive tool in your right hand and use it to loosen the right side of the next frame and pull it into the gap, usually the left side will now be free enough for you to lift the frame out. Look at the nearer side of the frame then turn it over keeping the comb vertical [so that it cannot drop away from the frame]. Working in this way you avoid moving your hands over the frames, which could make the bees see you as a predator.

Always hold brood frames over the brood chamber just in case the queen drops off.

As you work through the brood chamber keep the frames which you have checked close together in order to maintain a working gap. When you have seen enough push the frames back into their original position, try to move several together, and finish by using your hive tool to lever them close together. Smoke occasionally as you work to keep most bees off the top-bars.

At this stage you may want to check the supers, though their weight will have given you some idea. If you need to add a super to relieve congestion it should go above the queen excluder.

When you have finished block the smoker spout and lay the smoker on its side. The ash is best cleared out when cold.

FOR SALE

Bee keeping, overalls, hat and veil,
2 pairs of gloves, little used.

£40 ONO

Mr G Gould

01884 38105

Apiary Sites

Brian has information on two available sites, one near Buckfastleigh and one near Newton Abbot.

Beekeepers Quarterly

For the March and May issues you can view this for free at www.bkq.org.uk

We also have a group subscription for this magazine.

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

Apiary Manager Rod Saffery, 01803 782190, downtoearth30647@aol.com

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Collections from 12 Hembury Park, Buckfast TQ11 0ES

The Totnes & Kingsbridge Beekeepers' Association is a branch of the Devon Beekeepers' Association which is a registered charity no. 270675