



June 2009

Meeting: Saturday June 6 at 2.00 pm Adam Vevers, our Regional Bee Inspector will be at our branch apiary at Dartington. Adam will bring with him some Small Hive Beetles (dead ones) so that you will know what to look out for in your hives, he will also bring some SHB traps and show us how to use them.

Adam will also demonstrate how he reads a colony when he opens it, and he may also show us how he uses icing sugar as a varroa control.

Quite a busy afternoon, so don't miss it.

We also hope that the new Seasonal Bee Inspector, Clare Densley, will be there, Clare has been working with the bees at Buckfast Abbey and has just been appointed SBI, she will be working in our area to reduce the pressure on Adam.

Directions: From the A384, Buckfast to Dartington road turn into the Dartington Hall estate by St Mary's Church and follow the signs to Foxhole. As you enter the drive to Foxhole take the rough path on your left which leads to the car park where we will assemble.

Meet the Bees day: will again take place this month but with rather different arrangements since last year we were surprised by the number of people who appeared. This time interested members of the public are asked to contact Rod who will arrange a time for them to meet at the apiary in small numbers. This is partly a public relations exercise but we also hope to recruit people for the winter and spring course which is planned to start next September.

Next month we meet on **July 5** at Riverford Farm to see Phil's bees in their top-bar hives.

The **Totnes Show** takes place at the end of the month on July 30th, we need honey etc. to sell and some helpers, volunteers to contact Brian please.

Meet the Bees

With this newsletter you should receive an advertising sheet for our Meet the Bees days. Depending on how you receive Off the Comb it may be on paper or it may be as an pdf file, in which case we hope you will be kind enough to print it.

Would you please arrange for this advertisement to be displayed where you live, perhaps in a local shop.

We hope to recruit students for the next beginners course, so that we can continue to spend that income on improving our branch apiary.

Last month

The travel in convoy arrangements worked well and we gathered around Jeremy's hives feasting on oil seed rape. They had been working despite the recent weather and seemed to be reasonably well-behaved. After admiring Jeremy's flexible, kneeling posture to get down to hive level we moved away to be entertained to tea or coffee which Ena had prepared. Thanks to both for another enjoyable afternoon.

Another Polystyrene hive

At Jeremy's meeting John Laidler brought along a hive from Finland for us to see. This one has hard plastic surfaces which form the runners and extend to cover the edge of the box to protect the polystyrene from wear.

An unusual feature is that this hive is neither top bee space or bottom bee space but between the two. The

top bars are about 3mm below the sides while the roof is recessed by about 6mm giving a total clearance of 9mm, a generous bees space, perhaps allowing for a thickness of polythene sheet forming a quilt, substituting for a crown board.

The hive has now been painted and will appear in our branch apiary soon. As usual with this type of hive the price is an attractive feature.

Lighting the smoker

Here is something I learnt from our Secretary, Adrian. He lights his smoker with a refillable butane Turboflame lighter. This gives a very hot flame which does not blow out in the breeze. In bright daylight the flame is invisible, but I have not found this to be a problem.

An advantage for me is that my usual cartridges of mixed fuels can be lit directly by the hot flame so that I do not need to light a piece of newspaper first and then coax the smoker to burn well. The disadvantage is that sooner or later, Adrian says later, it will run out of butane at an inconvenient time so (as always) a back-up system is needed.

Turboflame lighters can be obtained from Supersales Outdoors in the Narrows in Totnes, but they were out of stock so I bought mine from Penrith Survival Equipment, tel. 017683 51666 or www.penrithsurvival.co.uk the cost, including postage was £8.36.

Queen marking

At this time of the year with colonies approaching full strength it can be difficult to find the queen, a job which is made easier if she has been marked with a dab of paint on her thorax.

I find that the most convenient paint to use is Humbrol gloss enamel which is sold in convenient small tins for use by model makers. The colour is up to you, there is a conventional list of colours, green for this year, but there is no compulsion. Older members will remember Eric Morrison who used only two colours, white and yellow, because they showed up well and he changed his queens every other year.

If you decide to use the full range of colours then choose light, bright colours, light green not dark green for instance.

Be careful which paint you use, some have a smell which resembles alarm pheromone, and the workers object to it.

Humbrol enamels are stocked by model and craft shops, they have a good selection at the model train shop at the Buckfastleigh steam railway station.

It is usual to apply the paint with the end of a match stick but I have been pleased with the results obtained by using the head of a nail held in a wine bottle cork, I chose a nail with a small head for this. The cork is easier to hold than a matchstick and less likely to get lost. Another advantage is that the nail is long

enough to use as a stirrer if that is needed.

I always mark queens during the summer months when there are drones around to mate with a replacement if something should go wrong. The easiest method is to use a queen marking cage and to press this into the comb to hold the queen firmly while you apply the paint. But for most of us a better technique is to pick the queen up and mark her and also clip about 1/3 of one wing so that she can not fly off with a swarm.

My method is to find the queen then press gently on her thorax with my thumb and first finger to hold her still and then pick her up by both wings. Push away any workers clinging on and lower the comb back into the brood chamber. Move away from the hive to the roof of another hive where the paint is waiting. Let her stand on the end section of the second finger of your left hand and use your left thumb and first finger to hold her thorax firmly. The thorax is a very strong structure so you will not damage her. Now you can clip the wing and apply the paint with your hands steadied by resting on the roof. I then put her into a matchbox while I do what else is needed before releasing her onto the top bars and replacing the queen excluder. It really is not difficult, but practice on drones first.

Left-handed readers will want to reverse those suggestions.

Stop Press: Late News, too late for the front page

Congratulations to Maggie Saffery who has earned another distinction in the BBKA Modular exams.

Congratulations also go to Adrian Kyte, Delia Elliott and Frances May who have all passed the BBKA Basic Assessment.

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

or Seasonal Bee Inspector Clare Densley 01626 211684

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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Phone John Harler on 01364 642517 or mobile 07769 878476
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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