



# Off the Comb

## News from the Totnes & Kingsbridge Beekeepers

January 2010

**Meetings:** this month our main meeting is on Saturday, 23 January starting at 2.00pm. Frances Wright will talk to us about her work as a herbalist, particularly some of the plants which are attractive to honey bees and her use of propolis. All will be welcome, so feel free to bring along any friends with an interest in the use of herbs. The meeting will be in the small hall at the South-Park Community Centre, Buckfast.

**Directions:** from the A38 at Dart Bridge follow the brown signs towards Buckfast Abbey. The South Park centre is on the right-hand side just before the Post Office.

The **Beginners course** continues on January 21 and **Beecourse2** meets on January 6 at 7.00pm to consider preparing for the 2010 season and using nuclei.

### Looking ahead

In February we have our annual dinner, this year we will be at the Sea Trout Inn at Staverton on February 27. More details next month.

And on 17 March we have an evening with Robert Aitken.

So we have three very different meetings arranged for you before we open up the branch apiary in April.

Don't overlook other bee meetings, see the advertisements in BEEKEEPING for Holsworthy and Somerset bee days, but book your place soon - they will probably sell out. Should we organise group trips to these?

### Membership forms

You should have received a membership form, please fill it in and send it to our Treasurer, now. More information on page 2.

## The membership form

Membership runs from January 1st for a year; and you pay the same whenever you join. So please do not put it off, do it soon; this helps to keep our records up to date and saves our Treasurer the effort of chasing late-payers.

New members will need to decide which branch to join. If you are living in south Devon then join Totnes & Kingsbridge, if another branch is nearer home then go along to some of their meetings and see if you feel welcome there. When you have joined one branch you can attend meetings of any of the DBKA branches.

## Membership grades etc

*Registered Members*, aka Full members, are on the BBKA register so they have the benefit of the BBKA insurance as well as membership of DBKA and a branch.

*Partner membership* is useful where two beekeepers live at the same address and are willing to share magazines.

*Associate membership* is cheap and covers membership of DBKA but not BBKA (so no insurance) and no copy of BEEKEEPING.

*Country membership* does not include BBKA (so no insurance) but does include BEEKEEPING.

*Bee Disease Insurance* (BDI) this provides some compensation if a Bee Inspector culls any of your stocks because of foul brood. But you will be compensated only if all

your stocks have been insured. Add on the possibility of catching swarms, making nucs etc, So now decide where you fit in and let John Harler have your form and cheque soon.

## Branch Committee

We will be meeting on January 10, mainly to organise the summer meetings. Do let us know if you would like a meeting at your apiary. We also need volunteers to prepare tea and coffee at the meetings in January and March.

## Apiary sites

Rod has given up a good site in a field north of Denbury. Brian has stopped using a site between Buckfast and Dartington. And the Estates and Properties Manager for Gullet Farm, South Pool, Kingsbridge will welcome enquiries from members wanting to keep bees there.

Contact Brian if any of these are of interest to you.

## Goodbye DEFRA, hello FERA

The Food and Environment Research Agency have taken over the NBU amongst other things.

If not already done you should register with BeeBase, go to [www.nationalbeeunit.com](http://www.nationalbeeunit.com) where you will find all sorts of information.

## Off the Comb

Could you write something for this Newsletter?

# Happy New Year!

## Hoping for a better honey crop this year

### Wax recycling

Every other year we collect beeswax blocks from members and exchange it for foundation. This year we will be doing this again, and now is a good time to sort out your wax, Strain melted wax through a cloth into any convenient mould, e.g. one litre fruit-juice cartons.

More information later but do prepare your wax soon.

### Biodynamic beekeeping

This is a term which I hear from time to time and of which I have only a vague understanding. But I have noted that when varroa first arrived they were opposed to the use of Apistan and Bayvarol when everyone else was in favour, and with hindsight I can see that they were right. Was this just luck or have they got a better understanding?

I sought advice as to a good source of information and was directed to the writing of Gunther Hauk, and warned off Steiner. Amazon then found this author's *Toward Saving the Honeybee* (and also gave a sample of Steiner which was most unimpressive).

Not having finished Hauk's book yet I will defer comment except to note that his suggestion for dealing with varroa is to use the organic acids and not to depend on thymol.

That I find interesting because I have come to similar conclusions, or at least that is my present thinking. So again I find myself in agreement with biodynamics although we arrived at similar conclusions by totally different routes.

I don't know how typical Hauk is of the biodynamics group so I went searching on line and found much more information when Google took me to Phil's website [www.biobees.com](http://www.biobees.com) where I found a set of frequently asked questions put to Michael Weiler, described as Biodynamic Beekeeping Consultant. The first of these questions is What are the essential differences between conventional and Biodynamic beekeeping? The reply:

The most important points are:

- The biodynamic bee keeper aims to preserve the unity of the colony; he treats it as a complete organism not as separate parts.
- If the colony begins to split from itself by preparing to swarm we harness the power of this process, we do not suppress it.
- We use the power of the swarm process for renewal and all breeding.
- We do not make artificial nuclei or induce queen rearing.
- The bees build their own comb; we do not give them any foundation apart from little starter strips.

*Continued overleaf*

### *Biodynamic beekeeping continued*

- We only use natural materials for the hives.
- We do not recycle wax in the hives.

There is more of this, enough to make an interesting discussion.

What do you and other members think?

Perhaps I should make it clear that these are my thoughts on the topic. Not Association views.

Brian

### **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](http://southdevonbees.org)

Chairman: Jeremy Wells 01364 72180,  
[ena@jeremywells.entadsl.com](mailto:ena@jeremywells.entadsl.com)

Secretary: Mrs Lilah Killock, 01803 866 028, [lilahkillock@hotmail.com](mailto:lilahkillock@hotmail.com)

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Apiary Manager Rod Saffery, 01803 782190, [downtoearth30647@aol.com](mailto:downtoearth30647@aol.com)

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or e-mail to [fire221@btinternet.com](mailto:fire221@btinternet.com).

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